

THE FASCIST COUP AGAINST VENEZUELA



**“THE LIFE OF THE HOMELAND
IS AT STAKE HERE”**

Hugo Chávez

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IS AT STAKE HERE”**

Hugo Chávez Frías
President of the Bolivarian Republic
of Venezuela

SPEECHES AND ADDRESSES
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Presentation

A BATTLE FOR VENEZUELA AND FOR HOPE

Today in Venezuela there is a struggle of the past against the future and against hope; a struggle waged by those who have traditionally been privileged against those who have always been socially excluded; a struggle of ignominy against dignity; a battle for the rights of the peoples of Our America.

The petroleum oligarchy, the big entrepreneurs, the owners of private TV networks and other media, the bureaucrats of corrupt and pro-management unions, the traitorous military chiefs and the representatives of Venezuela's political past, allied in a perfidious pro-coup coalition, intend to take power by any means possible, to overthrow the legally elected government of President Hugo Chávez, and frustrate the dreams of social justice of the overwhelming majority of the Venezuelan people, who witnessed the way in which those same classes have squandered the resources of the country for more than forty years.

Those who have attempted to paralyze Venezuela and bring Chavez to his knees since December 2, 2002, are the same people who perpetrated the fascist and bloody coup d'état on April 11 last year. They are the same people who in the very few hours they held power, dissolved the National Assembly and all state institutions, broke into private houses, and humiliated several political and social figure involved in the Bolivarian process, unleashed unprecedented media terrorism and tried to wipe out in one fell swoop all the just laws adopted by the Bolivarian government.

The people defeated the coup in less than 72 hours; they took to the streets to defend their leader and their ideas, together with military chiefs and courageous and patriotic young people. Early in the morning of April 14, Chavez returned to Miraflores Palace amidst the people's euphoria. The ephemeral coup d'état president, Pedro Carmona ("the Brief") rushed out through the back door and headed towards the dung heap of History.

President Chavez, in a generous and noble gesture towards his own adversaries, did not call for revenge against the coup plotters. He appealed to all political and social forces in Venezuela to put an end to futile clashes and work for the wellbeing of the people and the nation. But those forces, which used to run the country and ruthlessly plundered it, did not resign themselves to losing political power and continued to plot against the government after April.

Those coup plotters believed that in December, circumstances were right for dealing a deadly blow to the Bolivarian process. They were in a hurry, for early in the

year 2003 important laws were to come into force, such as the hydrocarbons law, which was intended to reform the almost private structure of PDVSA, as well as further actions that were to be taken under the Law of the Land, which would benefit hundreds of thousands of farmers.

This time, the coup plotters, under the guise of a so-called "national civic strike", bet on paralyzing the economic heart of the country. The attack against PDVSA was brutal. The pro-coup management of the oil industry, who had lived as privileged citizens, earning sky-high salaries by virtue of being members of the up until then sacred "meritocracy", ordered workers to join the strike, sabotaged the control stations of refineries and distribution centers, and destroyed equipment that was vital to the industry. Officers of the merchant fleet, under pressure and threats from these coup plotters, moored their tankers loaded with fuel to prevent oil exports and supplies to domestic distribution centers.

Their objective was to reduce the Venezuelan oil production of almost three million barrels a day down to zero (the State only received 20 percent of profits from that sale; the rest of the money was used to cover phantasmagoric "operating expenses"), to paralyze all refineries, and to strangle the government economically. But all their calculations and strategies failed, and the government, with the assistance of patriotic managers, experienced technicians, workers, retired workers, former PDVSA employees unjustly fired by the "meritocracy" and the representatives of the army are gradually getting the oil industry working again.

The pro-coup managers and their followers were all fired. With the support of loyal sailors and the Army and the Navy, most of the oil tankers were recovered and the export of fuel has been partially resumed. PDVSA was restructured and a process of re-nationalization of Venezuela's main economic asset has already started.

In despair about the failure of the oil sabotage, those coup plotters have tried new ways to attain their goals: in an attempt to stir up violence in the country, they have organized demonstrations in which most of the participants come from the upper and middle classes; they have attempted to convene an illegal consultative referendum to force the President to resign; they tried to shut down the banks by reducing working hours and closing them; they have appealed to people not to pay their taxes, nor pay for water, electricity, and gas; and they are trying to sabotage the beginning of the school year, a battle in which they are also doomed to failure.

Private television networks and other media have been at the center of the coup d'état plot. Their owners, namely, Gustavo Cisneros, Marcel Granier, and Alberto Federico Ravel, who used to be the puppeteers of governments in the Venezuela of yesterday, attack the Chavez government 24 hours a day, calling all the time for disobedience, disseminating gross lies about the domestic situation in Venezuela and the relations between Venezuela and Cuba, and broadcasting right and left the appeals and instructions from the coup ring-leaders. This is media terrorism, something unprecedented in history.

What the coup plotters want is to take power away from the people. What they want is to reinstate the past

with its social exclusion and violation of rights. What they are trying to do is to overturn the social works carried out by the Bolivarian process amidst extremely complex circumstances: 150.000 houses built for the people during the last two years; 15.000 houses distributed to the victims of the catastrophe in the State of Vargas; 3.000 Bolivarian schools opened where one million children receive quality education and adequate food; university budgets tripled; salary increases for teachers and professors; free treatment for all patients suffering from AIDS; more than 3.000 Venezuelans given medical assistance and treated in Cuba free of charge; water supply systems built to provide fresh water to two million Venezuelans for the first time in their lives; benefits given to thousands of farmers; the decision not to privatize the power, aluminum, water and oil industries, something that was attempted by the neoliberals in the past and is being attempted by the coup plotters today.

That is the reason why the Venezuelan people have taken to the streets to defend their dreams and hopes. President Chavez is at the forefront of that battle with honor, courage, and a high sense of his patriotic duty. He is determined not to give the power entrusted to him by the people to the fascist coup followers. His combative and philosophical words urge the Bolivarian forces into battle and are also an resounding denunciation of what the forces of internal reaction and their foreign allies wanted to do in Venezuela. This book contains several speeches and addresses by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, from December 2002 through January 2003, and are an indispensable testimony

of the battle that today is being waged in Venezuela for its people, for the ideas of Bolivar, because a better Latin America is possible, and so that the truth may be known.

Plaza Editions
Cuba, January 18, 2003.

SPEECH AT A FUNCTION IN TRIBUTE OF PDVSA EMPLOYEES AND F.A.N. SAILORS

**Carenero, state of Miranda, December 27th,
2002**

Sir and Madam Ministers,
Manager of the Carenero plant,
Workers,
Citizens,
Senior officers,
Junior officers,
Non-commissioned officers,
Troopers,
Friends,
Workers,
Merchant Marine officers,
Representatives of the media,
Friends all,

Just a few hours ago, we were right here on this yard broadcasting "Alo Presidente", a program that has reached out to the entire world. This broadcast was seen and heard from here. The message of everything we did and said

here in Carenero last Sunday afternoon was transmitted throughout North America, the Southern Cone and Europe.

We wanted to come here again to extend a special recognition. And that's the reason why we are here again today. The reason we are here in body and soul is to pin these awards, the highest decorations in the Republic: the Order of the Liberator and the Order Francisco de Miranda, on a group of civilian and military patriots who are currently teaching an example to Venezuela and the world, an example of many things, an example of the meaning of being a Bolivar's son, as you put it, my brother.

That a group of plotters – irrespective of their names, that a destabilizing organization, that a destabilizing plan will bend Venezuela? Never! No one bends Venezuela! (*Applause and acclamation*) First and foremost, because this is the cradle of freedom.

This Caribbean, these mountains, those valleys and those plains are silent witnesses of a deed that occurred here barely 200 years ago when we had an empire here, an empire that invaded us 500 years ago, an empire that sank its claws in the Venezuelan throat, an empire that ruled us for 300 long years. But from these very waters, hills, lands and mounts, emerged a heroic people that defeated the Spanish empire right here, all the way from the Caribbean to the towering mountains of Bolivia and beyond.

Half the free world, half the world of the Americas saw the Venezuelan people and soldiers march as they planted a seed of greatness, odyssey and heroism. No one should

forget that, because the Venezuelan people and its soldiers are made of this clay and history.

No internal or external force, however strong it is or claims to be, will ever bend Venezuela or stop this people that is willing and ready to be free once again. That's why what has happened here in Carenero in the last few weeks is just a reflection of what has been happening all over Venezuela.

Nearly a month ago, a group of plotters tried to rob us December, snatch our Christmas and stab the heart of their own mother, for they are also Venezuelans, and Venezuela is the mother of us all. Venezuela is the mother, is the homeland. But we, civilian and military men and women and workers, stood on our ground. And here we are. We have spared our homeland from the treacherous stab! (*Applause and acclamations*). We have spared our homeland from the treacherous stab that was aimed at it with premeditation. Today, it is gratifying to receive at our headquarters, the Palace of Miraflores, a status report on Venezuela and see that we are coming out of a critical situation our country was plunged into with its crude production and refining, as well as its gasoline, LPG and food supplies. The economic and social life of our country has been threatened, but we have overcome the most critical situation, and we are now in full recovery.

From here, Cerenero, I tell the entire Venezuelan people that you can count on this revolutionary government, its workers and soldiers, and its men and women. You can rely on our love and our sense of Christians, for God is also on our side. And He had to be,

of course, because we are fighting for justice, peace, equality and equity in this unequal world we live in.

Today, we are in a recovery mode. Effective from yesterday, we have started to reopen the oil wells that had been shut down. Between yesterday and today, our crude output has increased quite significantly. The vessels that had been immobilized, and were blocking almost all ports in the country, are starting to sail with patriotic crews of Venezuelan merchant sailors (*applause and acclamation*), supported by the Navy and the people. Right here in Cerenero we have a vessel that the plotters had made their destabilizing flagship, and they had claimed that no one would be able to move that vessel. And look, the *Pilin Leon* (vessels' name) has moved! (*Applause and acclamation*). It has moved indeed.

Since the resumption of its operations four or five days ago, after it was held still for more than two weeks, this tanker has unloaded 44 million liters of gasoline in Bajo Grande. It completed its unloading operation safely. They (the plotters) were against, for they argued that the tanker was going to blow because its operators didn't know what they were doing. That they didn't know? These people are expert workers both onshore and offshore, and they unloaded the full gasoline cargo. They sailed out of the port, raised the anchor and traveled to the state of Falcon, and in Punta Cardon, they loaded gasoline again. Here is the tanker back, now unloading gasoline for Caracas, Miranda, Carenero and the entire central Venezuela (*applause*). When the unloading is completed tomorrow, the tanker will set sail for more gasoline to return the Venezuelans back to normalcy. I am sure that, within a

few days or weeks, the long queues that many Venezuelans are still suffering, with a consequential loss of precious time sustained by entire families and workers, will disappear (*someone said something to him and people applaud*).

The same is true for the LPG. A boat has unloaded a major LPG cargo. What's the name of the boat that was here? (*He is advised that the name is Victory*). The Victory has already unloaded 35 000 barrels of LPG. So the LPG is here and we will begin to pump it soon. Men and women, families from Miranda, Caracas and the whole central Venezuela, we have LPG available, and these patriotic men will begin to pump it to secure the timely delivery of the gas cylinders – both big and small, that feed the household stoves and ease our troubles (*applause*). (*Someone from the audience speaks up*). I know you cook with timber. That's fine. I also cook with timber. But anyway, this is good news: we are restoring the supply of fuel: gasoline, LPG and gas-oil.

What this people did is a criminal act, a betrayal against the homeland and still they boast of it as if this were funny. They attacked Venezuelan's peace and tranquility. This is what these plotters have done but they are being defeated once again and will be defeated for good. (*Applause*).

Now we will board the *Pilin Leon* where I will decorate its entire crew, starting with the shipmaster and his whole crew of patriots who have reactivated, steered and will continue to steer their vessel to meet the needs of the Venezuelan people. We will extend a special

recognition to them all, including the mates, junior officers, rank & filers, managers, workers, technicians, and members of the Merchant Marine who have been awarded today the Order of the Liberator and the Order Francisco de Miranda.

These are the highest decorations a Venezuelan can be awarded (*applause*). I have made this decision because your actions are worthy of such recognition. You have been building our homeland. Just like Miranda and Bolivar, alongside with the Venezuelan people, freed Venezuela and half this continent from the Spanish yoke 200 years ago, you and all of us together are now freeing the Venezuelan people. It's a new freedom; it's a new feat of independence.

We are ushering in a new era. We are fighting for our independence, not our political independence, but our economic independence. We are shaking the chains of poverty (*applause*). The Venezuelan oil is one of our fundamental assets. By managing our oil and PDVSA properly – as will be the case now – and equitably distributing our oil earnings that represent a major weapon for the next few years, we will finally defeat hunger, backwardness, poverty and destitution, and we will give Venezuela full freedom: political and economic freedom and social equality (*applause and acclamation*). We live in a world with much inequality, and only through the proper management of our country's resources, will we be able to address these high rates of inequality.

That's why, as sons and daughters of Bolivar's – and I quote you, my brother – we have risen to Bolivar as the new liberators of Venezuela.

I congratulate you all. I encourage you to move forward more united and steadfast every day for this new freedom in the land of Simon Bolivar.

I hug you all, boys and girls (*applause and acclamation*).

SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE KILLING OF TWO GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS

Caracas, January 5, 2003

Being profoundly sad and being full of indignation as a Venezuelan, I am addressing all of you. But before making some reflections and conveying my message to all of you, I am going to quote Bolívar, our Father Liberator: "I feel the strength of my soul becoming greater and wider, and matching the scope of dangers always. My doctor has told me that my soul needs to feed itself from dangers to preserve my sanity; so, by creating me, God allowed this thundering revolution to take place so that I could live immerse in my unique destiny."

Simón Bolívar wrote this once and today I quote him while understanding the feelings of the Venezuelan people. These thundering images we have seen should raise our souls to face the dangers hovering over the Republic, the dangers and threats that are in store for our homeland.

Unfortunately, we have begun this year with these events. That is why this evening on January 5, Sunday, I am

addressing good Venezuelan men and women, those who feel the country beating inside them with each hope, with each dream, to express the great sorrow, the deep sadness, the rage we feel every time a Venezuelan dies from violence as a toll of artful calculations, as if the lives of our men and women could be measured in terms of political goals, in terms of sharing out petty powers.

I am sure that all Venezuelans agree with this resounding no. The killing of Venezuelans cannot continue to go unpunished. That cannot continue.

How many more Venezuelan homes will be mourning until the criminals cease in their efforts to destroy the country? How many more tears? How much more blood? We are not revengeful people. Rather, our acts show our strong intention to pardon, to forgive those who have carried out wrongful acts.

I do not harbor hatred in my heart. I only harbor hope that there is rectification, forgiveness to those who have gone wrong. But I should also say something. We must serve justice. The country demands it. The homeland is crying for it. The tears of the relatives of these youths who were assassinated is an urgent call for justice to be served. The expression of sorrow by the father, by the mother, by the relatives is a call for justice; it is a call for dignity.

We will find the killers of Jairo Gregorio Morán, 33, and Oscar Gómez, 24, wherever they are. We will catch the criminals even if they hide beneath rocks or even if they try to hide behind the smoke of the money of those protecting them, of those who have tried to destroy our country, of the plotters who are trying to strangle the nation by sabotaging the oil industry. They are the same who have attempted four

coups, those who have seen the end of the benefits from gross interests and sinecures, those who always were above the law and would like to continue doing with Venezuela what they please.

They should understand it once and for all: they will not be able to destroy the institutionalized order; they will not be able to attack the Republic and, above all, and most important, they will not be able to do away with the dreams of this people, who are defending this process with their souls and with their joy, but also with firmness and unselfishness, and even with their own lives.

That is a tribute to these Venezuelans who were assassinated, a tribute to those Venezuelans who were killed by the hands of violent and fascist elements; they were Venezuelans like Fabricio Ojeda, who was killed in his cell by members of the Rómulo Betancourt security apparatus; like Alberto Lobera, who was thrown to the sea in chains and returned to us by the sea to denounce his assassination at the hands of those who believed they could destroy his ideas for freedom; or the Venezuelans, whatever their political background, who were assassinated by henchmen in the south area of Lake Maracaibo just because they dare uphold the Law of the Land provisions; or the Venezuelans who were ambushed on April 11; or those who were killed on November 12 at the Plaza Bolívar in Caracas during the events in which Metropolitan Police officers were presumably involved; or those men and women who were killed on December 6.

I would like to read for you some stanzas by Chilean poet Vicente Huidrobo from his poem entitled "*Voice of Hope*": Man is patient, but not as patient as time/ when seen

from the edge of the night./ Man is long-suffering, his muscles have been chiseled by the blows of a thousand years;/ but earth is soft and understands and loves him./ After so many centuries, and as long as Man is amenable/ the earth loves him and asks for a kind of harmony/ and longs for a form of fraternal sweetness/ it does not want to be covered by tragedies nor to wander through crimes amid bloody passions./ The earth loves him, may it always be so/ it wants his meditative flower-like light/ it wants his happiness as a song needed to march/ so may those who destroy misfortune fall/ those who close the horizon/ those who prevent the singing/ may they be buried in the abyss of the night/ may they fall, yes, fall/ while we unload the dead at the edge of the planet.

Vicente Huidrobo, a great Chilean poet.

On behalf of the fallen, no matter their creed, no matter where, no matter when, these are poems of the soul to pray to God for an end to these violent events and so that we are capable, as a people and as a society, to reason, to shake hands and to advance along the way of justice, which is the way of peace the only way to peace.

The cry is unanimous in the streets of our cities, of our towns, in all the spheres of national life that are not committed to terrorist sabotage, that are not committed to coups. May there be peace, may those who break the law be punished, may there be no rampant impunity that brings about more unnecessary violence. That is being asked for by the citizenry, that is being asked for by the relatives of Jairo Gregorio Morán and Oscar Gómez, that is being asked for by the comrades who stayed with them today, on the day they are planted, as Alí Primera put it.

We shall not ignore such commitment to our people and to the memory of our dead. We cannot allow impunity and those guilty of violence should pay for what they did.

Fellow Venezuelans, you can see it was enough that the Metropolitan Police was back in the hands of the Lord Mayor and Henry Vivas for there to be death of more Venezuelans in public rallies.

For how long will parts of the Metropolitan Police continue being used to repress the people, to bring mourning to Venezuelan homes? How far can the shamelessness go, the obscure designs of these gentlemen, who are using the police force which should preserve peace and tranquility for the people of Caracas and which is doing nothing but causing more deaths, instilling more hatred and cutting off futures like those of these dead young men? And all this is happening with the connivance, with the shameless support of most of the media and, above all, with the conspiratorial involvement of the owners of private TV networks. This I say before the country and before the world.

What a way of twisting the truth! What a way of insulting our intelligence and our ability to make judgements, our right to consider the elements of truth to reach a position! No, they reach it on our behalf; they want to decide for us what the truth is and what Venezuelans should think, and they repeat it not a hundred but one thousand times, without considering that they, or at least some of them, also live in this land.

They want to divide up the country among themselves, as if Venezuela had not changed, as if we Venezuelans would accept being deprived of our homeland, the homeland of our fathers and grandfathers, the land where our children and

grandchildren will and are growing, the land where the children of Jairo Gregorio Morán and Oscar Gómez will grow up without a father — a terrible example of this media terrorism, which has even surprised and stunned the media of the whole world, which has ashamed foreign correspondents because of the coverage of the oil sabotage by the private media.

For them, those who sabotaged the Venezuelan oil industry in a savage attempt to strangle the homeland are heroes. They are praising those who damaged computers and machines the state had entrusted to them, without a thought for the terrible consequences a standstill in the oil industry would have for all Venezuelans and citizens of the world.

They did not stop to think —or maybe they did stop but didn't care— about the children who would be left with no schools, the patients who would be left with no hospital care, the elderly, the women and the men who would be left with no food and no electricity, or about Venezuela having no chance at all of meeting its commitments to its citizens and to our foreign clients.

Well, these terrorists are being portrayed by the private TV media and most of the press as heroes of the homeland, but they are traitors to the homeland. The pirates who blockaded our coasts —something that had not happened since 1902— are being presented by the media as valiant sailors. They are criminals, saboteurs and terrorists! Before Venezuelans and the world, I expose them as terrorists who are trying to deprive a people of their reason to exist, their body and their soul, and their hope contained in this good homeland.

But Venezuelans can feel safe. It has not been easy, brothers and sisters. It has entailed difficulties we have overcome with the support of thousands of workers who stepped forward to operate the oil industry, who have stayed on the jobs to keep the country's productive muscle working. It has been done by the public transport drivers, by the basic industry workers in Guayana, by all those who have defended the country in a gesture that makes them equal to the greatest deeds of our liberators.

There is no doubt in our minds we are conquering darkness. As of today, oil exports have already increased to 1.500.000 barrels a day and five tankers that were rescued are now sailing through our waters and the seas of the world to satisfy energy requirements.

Of the 1,200 tanker trucks that are needed for domestic consumption, 780 are rolling throughout the country 24 hours a day. This accounts for almost 70 percent of what is required and filling stations continue pump more and more gas.

Thus, we have seen a considerable reduction in gas station lines and we will bring the situation back to normal soon. The need for gas and gas cylinders, which are used for cooking in 80 percent of Venezuelan homes has been met by 60-80 percent.

Let the media go on with their lies; let the media go on with their fabrications. They have said all sorts of things: that there were oil spills in Cardón, not true; that there were gasoline quality problems, not true at all. They cannot hide the truth. PDVSA is being purged for the benefit of all Venezuelans.

We will see the results of the effort we are making now in the near future. It has not been easy; it will not be easy.

The international community has not remained unmoved by these terrorist attempts I have exposed. Friendly countries have generously reached out to us and helped us at this difficult juncture. On behalf of my fellow Venezuelans and of the government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I would like to thank the governments and peoples of Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, the United States of America, Trinidad and Tobago, Curacao, the European Union, Algeria, Russia, Iran, India, Chile, Canada, Uruguay, Argentina and Guatemala for their selfless aid. They have eternal friends in us, in this people.

In this struggle we are carrying out at present, we have reached the far-reaching decision to begin a thorough restructuring of our company, Petróleos de Venezuela, to make it stronger and more efficient and more responsive to the interests of the nation and not to those of a small group of privileged people who would have liked to keep their sinecures indefinitely but now have simply been fired and are legally accountable for their wrongdoings and excesses.

What kind of people are these who rejoice at the terrorist attacks against the oil industry? What homeland do they believe in when they even regard as a success the fact that our children, who are our future, simply stop going to school as a result of their sabotage?

Even UNICEF stated its clear position about the intention of the saboteurs to leave our children with no education, something that, it goes without saying, they will not succeed in.

Concerning the saboteurs' fruitless efforts against private and public education, UNICEF, representative to Venezuela, Dr. D'Emilio, pointed out that "no crisis justifies the violation of the rights of children, and it is proper in times of crisis that society as a whole sees to it that children are not the ones who pay for the consequences of the decisions made by adults." So far, she denounced, 30 percent of classes have been lost, and this is affecting educational quality and places Venezuelan boys and girls in a disadvantageous position compared to their counterparts in other countries in Latin America and the world.

UNICEF points out that Venezuela has ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and, in this framework, it commits itself to giving top priority to children, above any other interests. All this is also restated by the law on the protection of children and adolescents.

Thus "it is imperative," it says, "to have a greater commitment and willingness from everyone. Everybody should guarantee the rights of all children." In this sense, parents, tutors, teachers and private and public school principals are also responsible.

The saboteurs have tried to deprive the population of such things as the right to education, the right to free transit, to truthful information, to free economic activity, as provided in our national Constitution. It is they who are violating the fundamental rights enshrined in our Magna Carta, thus breaking the law.

This Bolivarian government has respected the rights of all citizens, and we will continue respecting them; but we will not longer allow small groups who have ganged up to attack those rights and the basic right we Venezuelans have to

live in peace. We will implement strongly —and so I state it— the principle of authority the Constitution and laws have bestowed upon us to ensure peace and tranquility in the Republic.

We also urge other levels of public power, especially the citizens' power and the judiciary, to uphold and enforce laws for the good of the Republic.

In one of his human poems, Peruvian poet César Vallejo wrote this: *Today, I love life much less, / but I always love life.* We love life, but much less so when the mourning for the death of Venezuelans hits us hard, when it hurts deep in our hearts. We feel an angry sadness because two Venezuelans, who deserved to see more dawns and to continue living with their loved ones, are being buried today by their friends, by the people who will never forget them. But we always love life, because defeating the saboteurs will be a way of remembering them forever.

Going forward with this project to rebuild the country will be a way of inscribing their names in history; putting the refineries which were sabotaged by the terrorists back into operation, defending the right of our children to go school, defeating hunger and poverty are ways of keeping them here with us.

Thus, on this evening of Sunday January 5, I am addressing good Venezuelan men and women, the great majority, those of us who dream of a beautiful homeland.

By the way, yesterday and today I was checking things up and getting in touch directly with the managers of the new PDVSA and I have some comments for you about that.

I want to congratulate you all. Thousands of men and women are recovering spaces, reactivating spaces, getting our oil industry back on its feet.

For example, yesterday I talked with the new managers in charge of everything related to ship designations, ship contracts and international trade and I should tell you that this sphere of our oil business has continued to improve considerably. Of course, there are still myriad problems as a result of the biggest sabotage that has been recorded in Venezuelan history. And, certainly, there is not a previous example, there is no precedent of a group of Venezuelans who, acting as a fifth column, acting as an occupation army, have betrayed their own country and have gone on with the sabotage operation they started against Venezuela, something I have defined as a stab to the heart of the homeland. Traitors to the homeland!

That is the way in which their names and faces will go down in history. Five hundred years will pass and future generations will still know their faces and names as those of assassins and traitors to the homeland.

Venezuelan history has no precedent of a media operation and of terrorism, violence and manipulation of such enormity as the one we Venezuelans are resisting heroically. But thus will the owners of those media be remembered, thus will those media be remembered, marked forever in political history, in social history, in the history of Venezuela.

Yesterday, for example, the new general operations manager in PDVSA East—which covers all the eastern part of the country—told me that the eastern refinery is operating at over 80 percent of its capacity, which is considered to be an optimal level, and they are refining 75.000 barrels of

crude a day. This has been a supreme effort. The eastern refinery is operating at its full capacity already. This percentage, below 100 percent, is considered as normal for refinery maintenance reasons.

Gasoline supply in the eastern region can be considered as normal—with some ups and downs. And very important—and this is an example set by the east for the rest of the country, for the west, for the south and for the center of Venezuela—the people's control brigades have been activated. For example, in El Tigre and in Anaco there were, as of yesterday, 29 people's control brigades. These are 10 or 15-member groups who have organized themselves as brigades to defend the oil industry and they patrol pipelines, watch the refineries, watch the oil fields and keep their eyes open. I call upon you to follow this example here in the center of the country, there in the south and there in the west of the country.

Fuel should be controlled also. These brigades are in gas stations, helping to control fuel, to fight speculation, black marketeering, and the abuses by some gas station owners that should be exposed. They should be exposed because they have a license and it can be taken away from them in the same way they got it. We have already taken away the licenses from some stations and from some managers who took part in the sabotage; because the license will be taken away from those who do not want to work.

We will create people's cooperatives to distribute the gas stations, the transportation lines, the fuel. These will be the people themselves, together with the armed forces and the workers of new PDVSA, the patriotic PDVSA. They will be no match for us. One day they will finally realize that they

will be no match for the morale and the strength of the Venezuelan people.

Concerning production there in the east, regardless of all the lies being spread every day by private TV channels which are being repeated by many radio stations and almost all newspapers in the country, and regardless of so many lies, this is the truth. I have my command post here and talk every day with the generals in the battlefield and, when I say generals, I am referring to generals of the armed forces, admirals of the armed forces, and the managers, who are the civilian generals. Also, and more than once, I talk with privates, with non-commissioned officers, with mid-level technicians, to get reports from people at various levels and have clear and accurate information to give it to the country, as I am doing this evening and as I will continue to do in the days to come and as it should be, on state radio and television.

In the east, normal operations began in Monagas and Anzóategui. As of yesterday we had stocks in Monagas amounting to 2.7 million barrels of crude and full production. And this started almost from zero. Our production was almost nil and now, in Monagas alone, we are—we were until yesterday—producing 300.000 barrels a day.

I will give you an example of how those traitors to the homeland sabotaged systems. A manager of the new PDVSA, a patriotic manager, was telling me that it is known, from all the investigation which is being carried out, that these people, before going and leaving the refineries and command posts with no management, sabotaged the systems. But they didn't just sabotage them with a hope and a prayer they sabotaged the systems in such a manner that they could

wait and be ready to come back in a week because, actually, both the political and media conspirators, the traitorous managers, had estimated that I would go before Christmas. They were wrong once again, as they were in April, and they will be wrong over and over again.

But let me give the example I was going to give to all Venezuelans so that they realize how far the criminal intentions of these people went. You know that all these systems, all the industry, are computerized and systematized. There in the east, for example, our technicians discovered the following: the sabotage consisted in changing the adjustment points in the control systems. A variable had been introduced into the computers of the control systems they have there so that temperature in the boilers or in the plants does not rise above 600 degrees, which is the temperature ceiling. Above 600 degrees, the plant reaches a dangerous level. Well, these gentlemen not only abandoned their posts but changed the adjustment points before leaving. That is, in this example I am giving you, they raised the ceiling from 600 degrees to 800 degrees centigrade. What would have happened if our patriotic and well-trained technicians had not checked these control systems and adjustment points well and had started the systems and valves and all the operationating system? When the temperature had gone above 600 degrees and reached 800 there would have been a disaster, an explosion.

Don't you remember that the announcers who tell the country about terrorism every day were saying, at the beginning of this new coup —now in a new form, because this is also a coup d'état and we are witnessing a new attempt at a coup d'état—, that most certainly there would be accidents, that most certainly there would be explosions

because —they said— the technicians and workers that stayed there did not have the skills and that the government would be responsible for the loss of human lives and the damage? They themselves had set up, there in the computers, the mechanisms to provoke explosions and physical damage and damage to security and to the life of workers. You can appreciate the criminal act they have committed. This cannot go unpunished.

The government I lead is working hard and doing everything it should do. I want to say this to the Venezuelan people. It is investigating, acting and pressing charges. What we Venezuelans are asking is that state institutions work, that the power of the citizenry works as it should, that they act in time and with efficiency and courage, so that the law is enforced, so that we have the rule of law here; so that the judiciary acts in time and with courage, so that justice is served and all these deeds that threaten peace in the country do not go unpunished. Everyone is accountable.

This is an example of how they made preparations for accidents in the systems to cause explosions. Fortunately, there has been not been a single accident so far, even though they have forecast and announced those accidents. They said the ship would blow up.

Yesterday on the TV channels —as every day— they were saying that there had been a fire in El Palito because smoke was coming out of it, that the El Palito refinery would explode, that people should leave the area, that it was the government's fault. And it turns out that I spoke today to the new manager of this patriotic PDVSA that we now have in El Palito and he told me that the smoke is completely normal. And the people who were saying it was a fire and that there

had been an explosion know it is normal. It is because we now are starting up the refinery, because we are starting the plants, and that black smoke that began to come out there from an El Palito plant is nothing but a product of circulating fluid used to fire to fire up the refinery. They are just burning diesel. We are conducting pre-firing up tests; thus, diesel circulates and circulates and it is burned —a completely normal procedure.

The terrorists even said —in a warmongering and terrorist message broadcast by all the media to the world—that it was toxic smoke, that there had been fatalities. What's more, many Morón and El Palito dwellers, who have grown used to seeing and smelling that smoke for a long time, told me they went to the plant, to the front of the plant, to express their support to those who are already making pre-firing up tests in the refinery.

Thus, instead of being bad news, that black smoke is great and wonderful news; it is the outcome of round-the-clock work by hundreds and thousands of people who have had to go down to the tiniest detail, to the smallest screw in the plants, the pipes and the compressors because sabotage was all over the place.

Well, next week, which begins tomorrow, the production over there in the east is estimated to reach a million barrels per day now. That's good news, patriotic PDVSA is recovering. I think this conflict was necessary to purge PDVSA, to carry out as the people say in the streets and the people ask for in the streets, the cleansing of PDVSA. The time has come; the Bible says so, the Bible is the word of God: "To everything there is a season under heaven".

So there was a group of people conspiring in the armed forces, etc? Well, the day came when we purged the armed forces. So PDVSA, a corrupt anti-national elite, was practicing sabotage and doing this? The time has come, we are purging PDVSA, and that is how change processes take place, how deep transformations take place. All the problems cannot be solved at the same time. That is why I guarantee the Venezuelan people that my government, our government, will continue to assume its responsibility staunchly and courageously, and progressively and gradually we will continue to further the Revolution. That is the only way. There is no turning back. We have burned the bridges behind us; there is no turning back. We will continue consolidating and furthering this revolution. That is the only way, there is no other.

I then invite all Venezuelans to continue making the great effort we are making to consolidate that dream, to keep it beautiful for our children.

Well, then, these are good pieces of news, aren't they?

In Anzoátegui production has also been a bit lower, but it has been recovering — in Anzoátegui production is less than in Monagas —, And on December 31 we gained control of the tank yard, of the office in El Tigre. Who was over there? Some managers doing sabotage, some managers who exerted pressure on their workers so that they would not come to work. We went there with the armed forces, the National Guard, the army, some new managers a prosecutor a judge, opened an inquiry and bingo! the managers were gone and this will be followed by the corresponding legal actions.

I have asked all the new managers for a detailed report, with witnesses, with prosecutors, with the armed forces, DISIP, the Military Intelligence Directorate. I have just held a meeting with all of them tonight, an in-depth investigation with the corresponding evidence. Because this cannot be left at that; this cannot go unpunished. What they have tried to do is break the backbone of the country. Well, then, the managers were changed. I salute the new management over there in the field office, tank yard. Later, on January 1, we seized control of the rest of the operations of the Anzoátegui area, the managers were also changed. We have a new manager in the southern district, congratulations! and he is a patriot, and they came to work day and night, relentlessly. I called them today and they were working. It was 8:00 p.m. and they were working.

Of course, many operators and workers who were being pressured and threatened by these former managers, doing sabotage, have now come to work under the orders of the new authorities. And I want to make a call to all the PDVSA workers, in the tank yard, in the refineries, who had been blackmailed and threatened by the managers we are changing. It is time: come and put yourself under the orders of the new managers and let us all work in order to quickly recover the optimal level of our oil enterprise.

Well, do you know what these saboteurs and traitors to their homeland did over there in Anzoátegui? They damaged the power input of 120 oil wells. Everything involved in the electric input, transformers, cables, they dismantled it. Billions of dollars is the direct material loss they caused our oil industry! I said it a few days ago, we have to be ready to begin the year, as we have, with severe

economic difficulties. But that is not going to stop us either, certainly not.

"I am the man of difficulties", said Bolivar. And I say today: "We are the people of difficulties, the harder our lot is, the bigger our heart and the soul of the Venezuelan people becomes, and the greater our demonstration to the world of our ability, of our love for our homeland and for the whole world."

Concerning our ships, we are also continuing to improve, several cabotage ships are already on the move.

Yesterday I was informed of normal wharf operations at El Palito by the new patriotic manager of the El Palito refinery, which was, as you know, sabotaged. Yesterday afternoon, there were two ships at the wharf, one, the Marshall Yukov, loading crude oil, loading 350.000 barrels of crude oil. It has already finished. Where is that crude headed for? For Barbados. The Pilín León, was unloading yesterday, it has already finished unloading 130.000 barrels of leaded gasoline for the central part of the country. That's it for wharf operations.

There are no more problems with the tugboats, nor with the tugboat captains, nor with the pilot. They had sabotaged all that. Supply and pumping, the supply and pumping is working normally from El Palito to Yagua and toward Barquisimetro. They had also sabotaged all the supply and pumping systems.

And yesterday afternoon the crude and vacuum units were started up. What does this mean? These are the main distillation plants. They had been stopped since December 7. They had been abandoned by the managers and also sabotaged. Congratulations to the new manager, to the

technicians, to all the civilian and military workers, to all of those who have put their soul into it! I am certain that there are people there, both civilians and military, who have gone without sleep for up to 4 days, sometimes without eating, deeply involved in the solution of a thousand problems due to the sabotage.

Well then, the crude and vacuum units of the El Palito refinery that had been stopped since December 7 were started up, I repeat. And what will the startup of these plants allow us to do now? We are going to begin producing airplane fuel right there now. No fuel, airplane fuel, was being produced there since the sabotage began. We are going to begin producing diesel and fuel oil, which is the electric power fuel, this is destined for the power plants. You know that these thermoelectric plants are powered by oil to generate electricity. Well, they also wanted to sabotage the electric power. Treason to the homeland! They are criminals, this is a crime against humanity that cannot go unpunished, no matter what! They have to go down in history for what they are.

Well, the load for other units will also be produced: downstream, vacuum gas oil, which is a raw material used to produce gasoline; downstream, when we start up, soon, the other conversion and treatment plants.

Well, then, with all this process, the El Palito refinery is expected to be working full steam in approximately two weeks, producing 50.000 barrels of gasoline daily and processing crude oil. We have gasoline there at El Palito for several days, even more so now with the arrival of the Pilín León, and we are solving thousands of problems.

In Paraguaná I also spoke to the new patriotic manager of the Paraguaná refinery, the largest in the world – by the way, I also greeted his wife and must send his daughter Ivón an autographed constitution. I will send it to you Ivón. This patriotic manager of Paraguaná informed me, among other things, the following – I speak to them on the phone for up to one hour and I take notes. This is my working notebook, of the Miraflores oil command; well, I'm a major in the oil battle now too –, this is some news: As of today, the 5, and tomorrow, the 6, the proper level will be reached. Sufficient gas is beginning to be sent from Zulia to Paraguaná. That is one of the reasons why the refinery is stopped, for lack of enough gas in volume and pressure for that large refinery to start up. This refinery is a lot more complex than that of El Palito, and even much more complex than that of the east, the Puerto la Cruz refinery.

Now, listen to what the patriotic manager in Paraguaná told me: the sabotage... The saboteurs also did their bit over there; but one of the things that most impressed me was this. When a refinery or part of it is going to be stopped, for maintenance or any other reason, as a safety measure, a process known as displacement must be done. That is, to clean the pipes, to get everything that was in the pipes and in the deposits out, so that nothing is left in there. Well, these people did not do this and there were pipes and deposits full of hydrocarbons, some even full of asphalt.

He told me, for example, that we have three asphalt tanks. The asphalt was hot. When the refinery was stopped, they turned off the power, the gas, and the asphalt gradually became solid, so now we have a number of tanks filled with solid asphalt. What do you think of that? What a

crime! Now, with a lot of calmness and patience, and observing the safety measures, we have to begin to heat this asphalt so that it will again have the consistency required to flow through the pipes and come out as a product. But it was left in the deposits, it was left there and solidified in three tanks. Each tank has 80.000 barrels of asphalt, like a rock. What marvels this group of traitors has done! That is why it cannot be left at that. The former managers of the plant have to pay for this, this is what jurors call objective responsibility, and later they must pay for their subjective responsibility.

This is the same as if the commander of a battalion, even if it is out of negligence, even when it is not done intentionally – as in this case –, due to neglect, has a depot full of weapons explode. There is objective responsibility there, for the mere fact that he was the commander of that unit, he should have inspected it, taken measures. He did not do it? Then, he is responsible. Then those managers who abandoned the plants, even if tomorrow they may say, when a court summons them – because justice has to be done, they will have to respond to justice, even when they say: “No, I did not know, I left.” No, no, you are responsible, because you were entrusted with the management of a refinery, the largest in the world, to boot. They are irresponsible, criminals, traitors to their homeland, that is what they are.

Well, they left hydrocarbons, oil, gasoline, kerosene and chemicals lying all about in that refinery, in the pipes, deposits and tanks. All of this is being cleaned up step by step, millimeter by millimeter, and soon that refinery, the

largest in the world, will also be working, although its process is much more complex.

Even in Cardón an old service has begun operating to use diesel instead of gas, to begin to start up units within a few days, especially the distillation primaries, as well as those of El Palito, to produce gas, low-octane gasoline, kerosene, diesel and fuel oil. It is estimated that by January 15 they should have started. That is an estimate. I will continue to inform you and the Minister of Energy and Mines and the President of PDVSA, we will continue to inform you step by step, because this is a heroic task and we must especially acknowledge these patriotic managers, these patriotic workers, the vast majority, the patriotic soldiers who have borne on their shoulders the oil heart of the homeland and have saved the homeland.

The wharf over in Punto Fijo is under control. In the last 10 days, 600.000 barrels of gasoline have left by ship and 300.000 barrels of crude oil have left for Curaçao, from Paraguaná. And we still have 3 million barrels of crude stored, that will continue to leave port. We have broken the blockade, they had us blockaded.

Fourteen thousand barrels of gasoline per day have left on tank trucks also from Paraguaná. We are sending it by water and by land. One hundred tank trucks per day have been leaving from Paraguaná for different parts of Venezuela. Twenty-thousand barrels of jet fuel have left for Catia la Mar, that is, airplane fuel, and domestic propane gas for Carenero, 3.500 barrels, this is liquid gas, what you are lacking. There are still lots of families cooking with wood; this people is amazing!

A few days ago, a woman, a humble housewife, told me: “Chávez, we are using firewood to cook, but it doesn’t matter, son, don’t surrender. If we have to cook with firewood for two years, for twenty years, we will cook with firewood, but this dignity of our homeland no one can take away from us.” How great you are, compatriots! I love and admire you more everyday!

They also told me today... this was today, that is, today Sunday the 5, that in El Palito, with the startup of the crude and vacuum plants that I have already mentioned, the first distillation process has been activated and I have the data here, given to me by Pedro Jiménez, a patriot that is over there in the refinery, that we have begun to produce now 14.000 barrels of jet-A1, airplane fuel, and nothing was being produced there for almost a month; 9.000 barrels of naphtha, this is almost gasoline, it is the base for gasoline; 31.000 barrels of fuel oil for power plants; 28.000 barrels of diesel and 30.000 barrels of BGO, which is the base for other products. In total, with the startup of the crude and vacuum plants in the El Palito refinery, we are processing 110.000 barrels of crude daily, which comes from Guafita, Apure and Barinas. Well a great part of the production was also stopped, We have now begun to reactivate the system, we are refining here and are continuing to bring in more crude.

At El Palito we still have to start up the catalytic fractionation and cracking plant – I’m almost a technician already.

The ships at El Palito – I have already said it –, the Marshall Yukov and the Pilín León finished their operations without any trouble; but, besides, another ship

has arrived at El Palito, the Norman Dee. It is unloading 250.000 barrels of unleaded gasoline. It has come from Trinidad.

Thank you, Prime Minister Manning and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

One hundred fifty thousand barrels of gasoline will be unloaded at El Palito. We bartered our crude oil for unleaded gasoline from Trinidad, of which 150.000 barrels are earmarked to Carenero. A tanker, Norman Dee, from Trinidad is sailing to Carenero. This boat will finish unloading at El Palito today before it heads for Carenero.

Today at 1:30 p.m., I spoke with the patriotic manager of the western region. I am finally able to talk to the PDVSA management. In the past, I could hardly talk to any of them. There wasn’t any communication channel.

The operations in the western region – that is, the entire western region - are 75 percent secured. This patriotic manager told me so today. And since he is a patriot, he will not be telling me lies. The lies come from others: the same who are waging a dirty war of propaganda, terrorism and violence. The truth is that 75 percent of the labor force is operational in the West.

The liquefied gas supply has recovered from the sabotage of which it was a target. The production and distribution of the liquefied gas that is piped to the residential sector in San Lorenzo, Bachaquero, Maracaibo, Cabimas and Maras are 84 percent normalized. This is liquid gas, domestic gas which is piped into your homes.

The distribution of LPG cylinders has been impacted by the yet insufficient LPG production in the western region. The LPG is being brought from the east; i.e., from across

the country. Next week, however, the fractionating plant in Ulé, on the eastern banks of the lake, will be ready to produce 80 percent of the total bottled LPG required in the western region.

From an output of less than 100.000 barrels a day ten days ago, our crude production is now 250.000 barrels a day in the western region. We are ready to produce up to 800.000 barrels a day in the next few days. The ceiling is 1.3 million barrels a day.

These reports I wanted to share with you underpin our optimism over this oil battle we are currently waging for the benefit of Venezuela.

Today I received yet another delegation from a friendly OPEC member, Iran. President Mohammad Khatami sent a special envoy and a team of experts who are assessing the situation. I want to convey to the Venezuelan people a message from our brother, President Mohammad Khatami, who is familiar to all of us, and I quote, "Anything you need, Chavez, for your people, that we can provide, you can count on Iran" to cooperate in the full recovery of our oil industry.

Yesterday, it was Algeria, today it was Iran, the day before yesterday it was Brazil and Trinidad & Tobago, all friendly countries. Venezuela is not alone. Venezuela has a handful of brothers and sisters around the world. Entire peoples are rising, praying and weeping for Venezuela. A good share of the poor in this world have pinned their hopes on the Bolivarian Revolution that is being carried forward against all hazards by the people, armed forces and society of Bolivarian Venezuela.

Today we buried two Venezuelans who were murdered yesterday. Jairo Gregorio Morán, a craftsman and resident of Avenida Panteon, Altagracia, who had identified himself with the Bolivarian Revolution, is survived by two children, 2 years and 4 years old. Some of the bullets that we witnessed being shot by officers of the Metropolitan Police and other individuals, who are easy to identify by the prosecutors and judges, hit and killed Jairo Gregorio Morán. Oscar Gómez, 24, also identified with the Bolivarian Revolution, went out unarmed, carrying only his morality and his Constitution. He was married. I convey my condolences to his family, his wife, son, parents, brothers and sisters. He is also survived by a one-year old son, Oscar Moises: God bless him! We will be looking after them all. His father delivered a message of both pain and courage to the nation yesterday. He (Oscar) was the coordinator of the Fifth Republic Movement in San Antonio de los Altos. By the way, his brother, an army lieutenant, is one of those young men who are fighting alongside their people and serving their homeland at Fort Murachi, in the state of Tachira.

The worst horror occurred last night in front of the funeral home where the bodies of these two Venezuelans lay in state. The Metropolitan Police caused it. They may come up with some story. But their actions have no justification. You saw some of the images. They tossed tear gas right into the funeral home. Of course, I immediately instructed the Minister of Interior, the National Guard and the Minister of Defense to disarm this police force. An investigation has been opened, and the

police command post for that area has been seized. The perpetrators are under investigation.

This was the last straw! These Metropolitan Police officers showed no respect for the sorrow of the family members, friends and people in general who had gathered there.

Anyway, we reserve the right to pursue against the Metropolitan Police Force any other action that may be applicable by the National State and Government and the civilian and military law-enforcement bodies, acting under the law. We have already taken an initial action that apparently failed to teach a lesson. While this intervention was fully in place – and you, the people, are eyewitnesses – marches and demonstrations were held here and there, but no one was killed or injured.

As soon as the previous authorities were reinstated as a result of a Supreme Court decision, we have seen them again: their helmets on as they trample on the people with their weapons of war and shoot at close range. We cannot leave this situation just like that. You can rest assured that I will take my share of responsibility and I will make the necessary decisions. A meeting will be held tomorrow for this purpose.

Today, we have held five meetings in which we have reviewed the laws and the Constitution and considered the necessary actions. You should harbor no doubt; we will take those actions. No one will destroy our country! No one will snatch our dream of a homeland. Be sure, Bolivarian soldier Hugo Chavez will do everything within his powers. I know that I can rely on the formidable and unrestricted support from the vast majority of Venezuelans

and the Armed Forces. I will act, as I must, at the right time. My right hand, much less my left hand, will not shake when I make the decisions required to make sure that the Venezuelan Constitution and laws will finally prevail.

As I said, since this task is not only my responsibility, I call upon the representatives of the other public powers: the legislature and judiciary and other public institutions, to take the measures required to safeguard peace in the Republic, the rights of the people, the laws and our territory. Territory, people and laws are the three basic components of the Venezuelan State.

We cannot let our territory, laws and population be trampled upon. However, they are being violated by these plotters who are intent on destroying not only Chavez, but also our Republic. They are intent on destroying the Venezuelan State and giving it to powerful multinational interests that have always had their eye on Venezuela, its oil reserves – one of the largest in the world – as well as its gold, aluminum, water and land. But they will be unsuccessful! This is the birthplace of the Liberator of the Americas, and we are made of the clay patriots and liberators are made of. They will be no match for us, the liberators of the Americas. We are here to secure the freedom of this land.

My brothers and sisters, the struggle is and will be tough. For we have dared remove masks, we have dared tell the truth and act accordingly. We have not only spoken, but also taken action consistent with our Bolivarian ideology and our revolution enshrined in this Constitution. No one will deter us from this path.

I call our people to unity, togetherness, faith and trust. I call on you to fight for our peace, our future, and against the terrorists, no matter what they call themselves and no matter where they are. I am, once again, at the forefront to lead this battle for Venezuela. Apparently I was born to fight for my homeland.

Before I conclude and say good-bye to you all, I recall a soldier who reminded me of one of Bolivar's mandates that, and I quote, "when the homeland calls, even the crying of mothers falls silent." End of quote.

By the way, I recommend this book written by Nestor Francia: *Puente Llaguno, hablan las víctimas* ("Puente Llaguno, the victims speak"). Look at this picture (*he shows a picture from the book*). It's similar to yesterday's images, the same characters, the same helmets, and the same weapons shooting the people at close range. This cannot and will not go on. My life is committed to that end.

I have been given this book – and I will say good-bye here. It's a great biography of a great fighter who said, "*I have a dream.*" Martin Luther King Jr. is a martyr for all of us black, white, yellow or red who are fighting for the peoples' dignity, equality, peace and justice.

In some pages, I read the following. Martin Luther King, Jr. was talking about Jesus, the King of Peoples, the Lord of Venezuela; Jesus, my commander; the Jesus of Bethlehem; the Jesus of Nazareth; the Jesus of the Cross; the Jesus who rose from the dead; Jesus the Redeemer.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Christian. We love Christ more and more every day. And let me tell you this, I understand Christ, his passion and love more and more

every day. I am more Christian and praise the Lord, my Commander in Chief, every day.

Before I say good-bye, I will read this, and I quote, "Jesus knew that his disciples" – and hear me out, for this is the word of the Lord for us His disciples; it's an order dating back 2000 years that is being given to us, disciples of Christ, who are fighting for Him and His ideas and His dreams – "would be confronted by a difficult and hostile world where they will clash with the recalcitrant politicians and the uncompromising protectors of the old order. Jesus knew that they would encounter cold and arrogant men whose hearts had become hard in the long winter of traditionalism. Aware of all this, He told them, 'Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves', and gave them a formula for action. Listen to this: "Lambs among wolves". And He went on to advise them to 'be as shrewd as snakes, but as innocent as doves.'"

It's hard to imagine a person who could, simultaneously, have the characteristics of both a snake and a dove. But this is what Jesus expects from us. We must be like a snake and a dove at the same time. "We must combine the toughness of a snake with the peaceful sweetness of a dove. We must be strong in spirit, but tender at heart. If we have the qualities of a snake, but lack the qualities of a dove, we will be cold, wicked and selfish. If we have the qualities of a dove, but not the snake, we will be sentimental, anemic and weak. So, we must combine them both.

And Martin Luther King Jr. closed by saying as follows, and I quote, "As blacks, we must combine a strong spirit with a tender heart if we are to move

positively toward the goal of freedom and justice." End of quote. Today I rephrase this great martyr and say that if we want a homeland for our children, then as Venezuelans, Bolivarians and revolutionaries, we must combine a strong spirit with a tender heart.

Good night, dear friends

SPEECH AT SAN CARLOS, STATE OF COJEDES

January 10, 2003

Viva Venezuela! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva Cojedes! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva San Carlos! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva Zamora! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva the Venezuelan people! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva peace! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva life! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva happiness! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva Bolivarian democracy! (*Acclamation of "Viva!"*)

Viva all of you, wherever you are, the men, women, boys and girls of Venezuela.

From San Carlos de Cojedes, today, January 10, 2003, this message goes out to the nation, on the national radio and television network. (*Applause and acclamation.*)

What a beautiful day this is, January 10, once again in San Carlos de Cojedes!

Mr. Johny Yanes Rangel, governor of the State of Cojedes, and First Lady of the State, Mrs. Rangel; Mr. Efrén Andrades, Minister of Agriculture and Lands; Mrs.

Nora Uribe, Minister of Communication and Information; Brigade General Luis Felipe Acosta Carles, Head of Regional Command No. 2 of the National Guard of Venezuela; Mr. Adán Chávez, president of the National Land Institute; distinguished authorities; Mayor of the Municipality; distinguished civilian and military authorities of the State of Cojedes; ladies and gentlemen awarded agricultural credits, ownership of rural land and housing in apartments in the Los Ilustres residential complex; distinguished special guests; Army Colonel Ibrahín Noriega Carballo, head of the military district of the State of Cojedes; National Guard Lieutenant Colonel Gabriel José Armas González, commandant of the San Carlos military garrison; Army Lieutenant Colonel Angel Moreno García; Commandant of the Army Training Center, Commander José Laurencio Silva; senior officers; junior officers; non-commissioned officers; career professionals; troops; national guards; seamen; civilian members of the Cojedes State Police, which is an example, a police force at the service of the people (*applause*); Lieutenant Colonel Commander of the Cojedes State Police Force; officers; citizens; workers; peasants; professionals; constructive and supportive members of the middle class; teachers.

I want to congratulate the teachers of the State of Cojedes, because the governor has informed me that not a single school has been closed, that all the schools are open, the public and also the private schools. The State of Cojedes is an example for all of Venezuela. Education is the soul of the people, of its boys and girls.

The governor has also informed me that the majority of banks in the State of Cojedes opened to the public

yesterday, the vast majority, although there are some exceptions.

And so, because of this, to all of you, professionals, technicians, workers, peasants, students, Bolivarians and revolutionaries of the State of Cojedes, I extend a Zamoran greeting, especially today.

And from here, of course, this message goes to all of the homeland, to all of Venezuela.

We have come here today, and today is a very special day for all of Venezuela, above all it is a very special day not only for remembrance, but also for even further strengthening our roots. It is very important for the patriots of today, when we are waging a battle of the patriots against the anti-patriots; of those who love our homeland against those who want to destroy the homeland; those of us who truly believe in democracy, and those who seek to slay democracy in Venezuela; those of us who give everything to the struggle for the homeland of our children, and those who want to sink the homeland of our children. This is how the lines of battle have been drawn in Venezuela today; this is the struggle taking place in Venezuela today.

Therefore this is not a matter of being pro-Chávez or anti-Chávez, no; that is not what this is all about. The patriots versus the enemies of the homeland: that is what the historic battle taking place in Venezuela today is all about. (*Applause*)

Those who seek to demolish the state's institutions; those who seek to demolish the republic; the traitors to the homeland who want to paralyze education, who even want to deprive the people of water; those who want to deprive

people of fuel, and gasoline; those who want to deprive the people of food: these people are truly criminals, and we denounce them as such before the entire world. They are traitors to the homeland and perpetrators of crimes against humanity. (*Acclamation*)

But the revolutionary government that I lead has stood up and raised the banner of national sovereignty and of the dignity of the Bolivarian people of Venezuela. (*Applause*)

Rest assured, all of the Venezuelan people, Venezuelan women, Venezuelan men, workers, peasants, students of Venezuela; rest assured that the Venezuelan state and the government that I lead will not allow our children and young people to be deprived of education. (*Applause*)

And may all the people of Venezuela know this: to all those who are attempting to sabotage the Venezuelan banking system, I warn them that the Bolivarian government, in upholding the constitution, will not allow them to sabotage the Venezuelan banking system (*applause*), or food, or fuel, or oil, or gasoline, or water.

You, the women and men of Venezuela, have a government that knows how to assume its responsibilities, and that knows what it is doing to guarantee all of you, everyone – because the government I lead is not fighting against the traitors to give gasoline only to the Chávez supporters, but to everyone. This government has an obligation to all Venezuelans, even when they oppose or disagree with the Bolivarian government. This does not matter to us. What matters to us is the happiness and peace of all Venezuelans! That is our supreme responsibility.

The government I lead is not fighting against the traitors to the homeland in order for the schools to operate

solely for Chávez supporters or the children of Chávez supporters, no. The primary schools, secondary schools, vocational schools, universities, higher education institutes, all of them must open their doors to provide education to all of the children and all of the young people of Venezuela (*applause*), regardless of the political views of their parents, because the children and young people are not to blame for the conflicts among adults. They have basic and fundamental rights, and this government and the Venezuelan state will take all of the actions that need to be taken to guarantee all Venezuelans food, education, housing, health, peace, tranquility, public order, and true democracy, like that which has been emerging in Venezuela over the last three years.

All the people of Venezuela can rest assured of this! (*Applause*). I declare it from here, San Carlos de Cojedes, today, January 10.

Now, I was saying... (*Acclamation*)

Now then, you all know that a hand has five fingers, right? “Is the state going to see to this?” Yes, everywhere I go, the people shout to me, “hård hand”. The Bolivarian government is just one of the five fingers of the hand of the state. (*Acclamation*). We also have to ask all of the institutions and all of the members of those institutions to fully assume their responsibilities, civilian power, judicial power fundamentally, and above all the latter. Venezuela needs judges who have dignity and who will dare to adopt the decision to send to prison all those who need to be sent to prison. (*Acclamation*)

The judiciary is one of the fundamental structures of a state needed to ensure justice and peace, to ensure that laws and institutions are respected.

Therefore, I as the head of state and as a citizen trust that from within the heart of judicial power in Venezuela, the honest judges who certainly exist will begin to rise up with dignity, that they will have the courage and dignity needed to adopt decisions on the grounds of the law and to send to prison the traitors to the homeland (*acclamation and applause*), the terrorists, the saboteurs, the murderers who massacre the people. (*Acclamation*)

This is a nationwide clamor, and I join in this nationwide clamor, because the state must function as a whole. It is essential for all of the national and regional powers, executive, legislative, judicial, electoral and civilian, to fully assume their responsibilities.

This is the road we are following, in any event. At the core of these powers is the greatest of all powers after God, which is the sovereign power of the Venezuelan people, and this is the power that will ultimately set the rhythm of the battle and the path of the struggle. (*Applause*)

You are the most powerful force that exists between heaven and earth, after God, you, the sovereign people of Venezuela.

That is why, with all those banners held aloft the immense plain of Cojedes, we have come here today to even further strengthen our revolutionary conviction, to gain strength from this noble and generous land in order to even further reinforce our irrevocable determination to give our entire lives to the struggles for the dignity and

happiness of all Venezuelans, of all our beautiful homeland. (*Applause and acclamation*)

We have come here today to pay tribute on this day to the courageous citizen, the general of a sovereign people, Ezequiel Zamora, to his immortality, because Zamora did not die in San Carlos; Zamora lives with us, Zamora became the plain, Zamora became the people, Zamora rides today in the sunlight, as one of Venezuela's greatest writers proclaimed. And today Ezequiel Zamora is here with us, with his song of freedom, with his cry for land and free men and women, popular elections, to the horror of the oligarchy. (*Applause and acclamation*)

That is why we say today that we have not come here to cry over the death of Zamora, no! We have come here to say, from San Carlos, where a traitorous and murderous bullet brought an end to his mortal life on that January 10, 1860, we have come to declare from here to all of Venezuela that Zamora did not die. We have come here today instead to say instead, Viva Ezequiel Zamora, the general of the sovereign people! (*Applause and acclamation of "Viva!"*)

And we are here today following his example, because Zamora was the first great Venezuelan, after Bolívar, who took up the defeated and betrayed banners of independence and went to battle, leading the Venezuelan people, energetically waving those banners of justice. That was Bolívar's dream, but it could not become reality, because as the Liberator himself said so well shortly before his death, "I have ploughed the sea, my enemies have led me to the doors of the tomb; I forgive them."

Bolívar, who was a great man, the greatest in all our history, was betrayed. Bolívar was expelled from Venezuela by the Venezuelan oligarchy, and banned from returning to his motherland. Sucre, the Great Marshall of Ayacucho, was expelled from Venezuela by the Venezuelan oligarchy, and banned from returning to his own homeland.

After the war of independence, the Venezuelan oligarchy destroyed the Bolivarian dream, betrayed Bolívar, and took over the lands and all of the wealth of the country. The peasants and all the people of Venezuela began to live worse than before independence, and the peasants began to ask themselves, "Why so many years of war, why so many sacrifices, if after the death of Bolívar, our lives are worse than before?" And that was what led Ezequiel Zamora to rise up again, to fill the hearts of the people with dreams, and to lead the way, calling the peasants to the struggle. Ezequiel Zamora left sown in Venezuelan soil the seed of hope, the seed of equality, and the seed of dignity.

Today, so many years later, in this strong breeze blowing in San Carlos de Cojedes, we feel the soul of Zamora, which became the people, and is now in open battle. (*Applause and acclamation*)

We are not here simply to remember Zamora, we are not here simply to commemorate him, no. As every citizen knows, it is essential for all of us revolutionaries to consolidate our revolutionary ideology.

The revolutionary ideology that is driving this Bolivarian revolution has not been imported from other lands, it is not an ideology foreign to our own nature, not at all. Our ideology is autochthonous, our ideology is as

Venezuelan as the plain, our ideology is the product of our own history, our own clay, our own legends and our own dreams.

Our ideology is fed by many currents. One of them is the Zamoran current, another is Bolivarian, yet another is Robinsonian. These are the three roots that inspire and nourish the ideology of the Bolivarian project today.

Nothing could be better, therefore, than to review Zamora's doctrine, his plan for distributing lands to the peasants so they could work them, his plan for an agrarian revolution, his educational plan, taken from Simón Rodríguez; his plan for an egalitarian society, without gross privileges for a small minority against the interests of the majority; his plan for a federal nation, for the union of local powers with the national power, and also his international plan to resurrect the Bolivarian Amphyctionic project for the union of all the countries and peoples of Latin America. (*Applause and acclamation*) Those were the plans of Zamora, the general of the sovereign people, who still lives among us today!

And so that is why we have come here, once again, to our beloved San Carlos. It has become a tradition for us to be here. But just look at how we have been moving forward along this path over the years.

We have come here today not only to sing the federal anthem; we have also come, for example, to hand over deeds to land, because that was one of Zamora's projects. We have also come to hand over credits to the peasants, because that was one of Zamora's projects, and Bolívar's too, of course, and it is our project. We have also come to even further strengthen our commitment to the producers in

the countryside, to those who produce food, the food on which the Venezuelan people live. We have come to give them ever greater support, in terms of land, machinery, credits, technology and technical support, so that in the medium term, Venezuela can have a productive and diversified economy, one that does not depend so much on petroleum, but also has a productive branch. And then we Venezuelans will not have to continue importing so many of the basic foodstuffs consumed by Venezuelan families. Instead we will produce them here, with ownership of the land.

That is why today we have handed over a significant number of deeds granting ownership of lands. A total of 96 men and 25 women, or 121 beneficiaries in all, have been presented with deeds awarding them ownership of land today. Now they will be the owners of the land they work, a total of 3146 hectares handed over with an average of 26 hectares per individual, per peasant, per producer.

At the same time, we have granted 20 million bolivars in credits today for migrant farmers. This is another project of the Bolivarian Revolution, recognizing the historic and productive value of the migrant farmers, because they have never received any kind of state support. Now we have a national project for the Bolivarian migrant farmers, and we have begun to provide credit for them. They are small producers (*applause and acclamation*), micro-producers, but on a nationwide level they produce a very significant share of the food we consume in Venezuela. But we need to even further strengthen the traditional indigenous system of migrant farming.

In addition to this, we have also handed over ownership of the land, the *conucos*, as the parcels are traditionally called. We have handed over 484 parcels in several states: Cojedes, Falcón, Carabobo, Guárico, Mérida and Zulia. And now I am announcing that in the month of February we will be handing over 470 more parcels to peasants in the states of Vargas, Barinas, Falcón, Bolívar, Trujillo and Lara. In March, we will hand over 1170 parcels for a total, this year, of 2124 parcels we are awarding to small producers, to allow for greater consistency in the productivity of the land. This is a policy we must continue to promote.

That is why this Revolution is built on the truth, on reality.

This agrarian development and food security program is based on the Land and Agrarian Development Act that was adopted by the revolutionary government in 2001. This act is one of the reasons why the oligarchy has lashed out like a poisonous snake, attempting to destroy the path of justice that we are sowing throughout the length and breadth of our national territory. (*Applause and acclamation*) They will not succeed, because they cannot defeat the people! (*Acclamation of "No!"*) They cannot defeat our morale! (*Acclamation of "No!"*)

Now, listen carefully, for here is some clear evidence of the damage being done to the country by the traitors to the homeland. With the attempt made in December to shut down the oil industry through the most serious act of sabotage ever known in Venezuelan history, they did not succeed in shutting down the oil industry, nor will they ever succeed in shutting down the oil industry.

(*Acclamation*) On the contrary, because now PDVSA is being purged of the traitors to the homeland who had formed part of its management for a very long time, almost 1000 of them have been fired. (*Acclamation*). We are cleaning up the PDVSA, and now we have a board of directors and management that are truly patriotic; only now can we say the PDVSA has begun to be the property of Venezuelans, the property of the Venezuelan people.

Nevertheless, I will repeat what I said several days ago, as the year 2003 was beginning: All of us Venezuelans must be prepared for a difficult time as this new year begins. We will do everything we can to continue supporting, above all, the neediest. But we have to realize that what these traitors did is genuinely going to affect public finances. Just do the calculations: Venezuela produces an average of almost three million barrels of oil a day; in December, for most of the month of December, we were producing barely 150.000 barrels of that almost three million. And for several weeks we were not able to sell even a single barrel of oil, because we did not have the ships available, because those traitors grounded all of the ships and sabotaged others. The gasoline we consume is normally produced right here in Venezuela, and sold at a very low price; we have had to import gasoline, paying international market prices for it, and then sell it at a very low price to the Venezuelan people.

The expenditures we will have to make and are already making to repair the damage they did to the oil wells, the refineries, the pipelines, the ships, the tugboats, will total billions of dollars that now have to be spent to make

PDVSA completely operational after the sabotage. We are spending billions of dollars to import food.

We have had to import meat from Brazil, milk from Colombia, and also wheat flour; we have brought a warship full of flour from Colombia to sell to the Venezuelan people, and also long-life milk. A Venezuelan navy ship has had to carry food from Colombia. Why? Because there are a number of heartless business owners here who have stopped producing wheat flour, and are stockpiling rice and corn. Now we are spending a great deal of money importing food from Colombia, from Brazil. We have had to import rice from the Dominican Republic, thousands of tons of rice, to sell the people at the lowest prices possible.

But I am warning these heartless business owners who are stockpiling the corn, the rice, the other products that belong to the Venezuelan people, that they should make no mistake about Hugo Chávez, that they should make no mistake about this government (*acclamation*), make no mistake, because in the enforcement of the Constitution of the Republic and my powers as head of state and my responsibilities as president of the republic, I cannot allow them to strangle the people through starvation. I cannot allow children to die because there are no medicines or because there is no milk. I cannot allow the people to drown in hunger and death. Above all else, there is my responsibility, sworn before God and the flag, to defend the Venezuelan people (*acclamation*). Above all else, and within the framework of the Bolivarian Constitution!

For example, when a group of traitors attempted to prevent the distribution of gasoline by hijacking the tanker trucks, I gave the order for the Armed Forces to rescue the

trucks and place them at the service of the people. And I recall that one of the officers with whom I have been in the closest contact over these last months or weeks has been none other than Brigade General Luis Felipe Acosta Carles, who is here today. (*Applause and acclamation*)

Well then, this general, this patriot, has even been the target of death threats, his family has been pressured in many ways, two trials have been opened against him, simply because he fulfilled his duty. General, I will say to you what I say to all of the generals of the republic, I will say to you what I say to all of the admirals of the republic, and what I say to all of the senior officers, the junior officers, the career professional non-commissioned officers, the sergeants, the enlisted personnel and soldiers, and the seamen of the Armed Forces of which I am commander in chief by mandate of the Venezuelan people. I say to you, General Acosta, that it does not matter if they bang pots and pans outside your house, as they have done to your wife and small children; it does not matter if they threaten you; it does not matter if they threaten you with a trial. I know it does not matter to you, and it does not matter to any soldier if they threaten him, because, quite simply, you, the soldiers, are fulfilling your overriding duty to defend the sovereignty of the Venezuelan people (*applause*), the sovereignty of the sacred territory of Venezuela, and the sovereignty of the laws of Venezuela.

A state is made up of three fundamental components – listen carefully, so that this is very clearly understood by the civilians and the military who are here today and who are living throughout the whole Republic today. The first is the territory, and the territory is not only the land; the

territory is also the sky, until it reaches infinity. That is Venezuela, up there, until it reaches infinity (*applause*). And the waters of the Venezuelan Caribbean Sea, of the Venezuelan Atlantic Ocean, of the Venezuelan rivers, of the Venezuelan lakes. All of this is the territory of Venezuela.

Second: the population. There are more than 23 million of us living in the immense territory of Venezuela. The population that was born here, whose parents and grandparents are now part of the territory, just as we will one day become part of that sacred territory. We will be swallowed up by the earth one day, like seeds; but our children will continue living here, our grandchildren will continue living here, forever and ever. There will be a Venezuelan people, and what a people, the people of Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of America, the people of Guaicapuro, the people of Zamora, a people of fighters, a people of liberators, a sovereign and eternal people. (*Applause and acclamation of "Chávez! Chávez!"*)

So, we have first of all, what is the first? The territory. Second? The population. And third? The constitution and the law. These are the three components of the state. Now the state must be sovereign, and the people and the Armed Forces are here to guard the sovereignty of the territory, the population and the laws of Venezuela, in other words, to guard the Venezuelan state. This is a supreme responsibility.

We cannot allow any one of the three elements that make up the state to be violated or trampled. Territory, population and laws. We must defend and hold high the banner of freedom and sovereignty.

That is why I say to you, General Acosta, and to all of the members of the Armed Forces of the Cojedes Garrison and the entire country, bless you all, soldiers of the homeland (*applause*), bless you all. Today you deserve the blessings of the people. Today more than ever you deserve to be soldiers of Bolívar, because you are fulfilling the orders of General Bolívar, there in his final resting place, shortly before his death, when he stated – never forget this, soldiers of the homeland – in his final proclamation, “The military must take up their swords in defense of the social guarantees.” Continue taking up your swords, General Acosta, in defense of the guarantees for the Bolivarian people of Venezuela! (*Applause.*)

So as I was saying, I ordered the military, in a presidential decree, acting under the National Constitutional, and under the Organic Law of Security and Defense, I ordered the military to seize the oil wells, to seize the refineries, to seize the tanker trucks and get them rolling, and they did it. I am also prepared to take the actions that need to be taken to ensure the distribution of food to the Venezuelan people. (*Applause*)

And so this is a preparatory order that I am issuing to all of the Armed Forces, the state institutions, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. The minister, Efrén Adrades, has also been working a great deal on this; he is a real revolutionary, committed to his work and his responsibility. But if we had to go to the extreme, within the framework of the Constitution, of ordering the requisition of the warehouses where they have the corn and rice stockpiled, then I will do it. (*Acclamation*) Make no mistake about Hugo Chávez! (*Acclamation and applause*)

The governors should begin preparing the plans, the commandants of the garrisons should have their plans prepared for the military seizure of the food production plants that will have to be seized (*applause*), the military seizure of the warehouses and silos with the food that a few oligarchs are denying the Venezuelan people. (*Applause*) I cannot allow this, and there is no way in the world that I am going to allow it!

And any decision I adopt will be, I repeat, within the framework of the constitution. They are the ones who are violating the constitution! (*Acclamation*) They are the ones who are breaking the law! (*Acclamation*)

And so I say this today, from San Carlos, to launch a call at the same time to all of the Venezuelan people from all sectors, as I have already said. This does not only concern the Chávez supporters, no. The life of the homeland is at stake here, education, health and life itself are at stake here. They are trying to kill off the Venezuelan people from hunger, and we are not going to let that happen, absolutely not. (*Acclamation*)

There is a government here, and a people, and armed forces, and state institutions!

I want to send a greeting to the Supreme Court of Justice and the judiciary, and I am calling on them on behalf of the people to guarantee that the law is enforced; and those judges who do not uphold the law should be sanctioned and removed from their posts. (*Applause*)

No judge can say he is invulnerable, no. Nobody is above the law. I am not, but just as I am not above the law and just as I am obliged to uphold the law and ensure that the law is upheld, all of the judges of the republic are

obliged to uphold the law and ensure that the law is upheld and enforce justice. (*Applause*)

I would likewise like to send a greeting from here to the Attorney General of the Republic, who is an eminent citizen and an eminent Venezuelan, and I call on all the public prosecutors of the republic to ensure that the law is upheld, to lead up the battle for justice, which is the only path to true peace. If there is no justice, there will be no peace in Venezuela. There must be justice to ensure the road to peace and to a beautiful homeland for our children and for the future descendants of our children. (*Acclamation of "Justice! Justice!"*)

Now, at the same time, what is also happening is that – listen to this, women and men of Venezuela – the enemies of the homeland are determined to remove Chávez from the government. (*Acclamation of "No!"*) They are dying to remove Chávez from the government. (*Acclamation*)

Now then, they organized the coup d'état of April 11 to remove me from the government, and they did remove me, but only for 47 hours (*acclamation*), thanks to God, the people and the patriotic soldiers.

Then they launched an oil coup in December, and they thought I would be leaving in December. According to all their plans, it would be a Christmas without Chávez. (*Acclamation*)

Since they failed with the military coup in April, and they failed with the oil coup in December, now they are trying out another kind of coup, an economic coup, which I have been referring to here. They are trying to deny the people food, medicine, and even water. They are not going

to succeed, but I am calling for unity among everyone. They are not going to succeed.

But, in addition, they are trying to stop education, as a way of hurting our children and young people. But they are not going to succeed in this, either. (*Acclamation of "No!"*)

The majority of the public schools are open, and the private schools as well, because I am sure that many people have reflected carefully over this insanity.

It is one thing to be against Chávez, and it is another thing to be against the life of the country. It is one thing to disagree with Chávez, and it is another thing to agree with killing off the Venezuelan people through hunger, with destroying the homeland.

I am sure that the majority of those who do not agree with me, and they have their reasons for thinking the way they do; I am sure that the majority of Venezuelan men and women who oppose me, and I respect them all the same, because they are also Venezuelans and they have the right to defend what they believe in; I am sure that after carefully observing and analyzing the insanity of these coup-plotting leaders and traitors, I am absolutely certain that the majority of Venezuelans who do not agree with me are coming back to their senses little by little. Little by little, they must clean away the garbage that has been thrown at them. Little by little, they must cure themselves of the poison injected into their souls through the vicious campaigns waged by the Venezuela median, and above all, the Venezuelan television stations (*acclamation*), television stations that have put themselves at the service of lies. There are of course exceptions, but I am talking about the four major channels in Venezuela: Channel 2, Channel 4,

Channel 10 and Channel 33 (*acclamation*), the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse have unleashed their hatred and the historical hatred of the Venezuelan oligarchy against the Venezuelan people. This is another matter that will need to be clarified (*acclamation*); the time will come when we will need to clarify it, because, definitely, either the owners of the networks have to comply with the Constitution and the law, or the law of Venezuela has to be enforced against them. (*Applause*) This will definitely have to be done.

We have been quite flexible, we have been quite permissive, we have opted for dialogue to try to convince them, since they are also Venezuelan, to respect the truth.

Just now, this morning, I met, for example, there in the Palace – this is to give you an idea of how far these private television networks go – with the relatives of the two Venezuelan compatriots shot dead at point-blank range on January 3. There is every indication that they were killed by the Metropolitan Police, which has been taken control of and will continue to be taken control of by the national government! (*Applause and acclamation*) And not only will that takeover of the Metropolitan Police continue, but I have given instructions to go even deeper, to the core, because there are groups of murderers in there, genuinely subversive groups, who act outside the law wearing police uniforms and carrying police weapons. This cannot be allowed! And we are not going to allow it, we are not going to allow it!

There are members of the Metropolitan Police who have taken their guns and motorcycles home. So I gave the order to the Ministry of the Interior and Justice and the

Weapons Department of the Armed Forces to inspect every last pistol and every last machine gun in the possession of the Metropolitan Police. (*Applause and acclamation*) And if the weapons do not appear, then the heads of that police force will have to answer to the government and to the armed forces for the weapons of the Republic, because those weapons belong to the republic, they do not belong to any individual, or to any authority.

Basically, what I want to say with this, here in San Carlos, is that the Bolivarian government is prepared to tighten its grip where it needs to be tightened and as much as it needs to be tightened in order to guarantee peace for the Venezuelan people, to guarantee the state, to guarantee the survival of the republic and to guarantee the sovereignty of the territory, the population and the law. (*Applause and acclamation*)

As I was saying, this morning I was speaking with the relatives of the two Venezuelans murdered on January 3, there in La Bandera, and the mother of one of them told me that she is suffering terribly, not only because of the death of her son, which is already enough to make any mother feel heartbroken, but also because now some of the television stations are tarnishing the memory and the honor of her late son. Some television stations and some senseless and irresponsible hosts of television programs have been saying that he was a Colombian guerrilla, that he was trained to kill people in Cuba. They have even been showing a picture of him that has been doctored to make it look like he has a gun in his hand, when what he was actually holding was the constitution. His weapon on the

day they murdered him was the constitution! (*Applause and Acclamation*)

So you can see how far the media is capable of going, or rather how far the owners of the media are capable of going. I have denounced this, and will continue to denounce it to the world.

The day before yesterday I spoke with Mr. Kofi Annan, the secretary general of the United Nations, and he asked me what was happening in Venezuela, because he was concerned. I told him, "Well, on behalf of the Venezuelan people, I thank you for your concern." He asked me to explain the situation, and I told him, "What we have here is a group of terrorists, Mr. Kofi Annan; what is going on here is not a democratic struggle, no. There is us, the men and women who support democracy, fighting against a gang of terrorists, coup plotters and fascists." (*Acclamation of "Terrorists! Terrorists!"*) And I also told him, "There's one of them over there in the United Nations, very close to the highest bodies, a fascist, a coup plotter, who is also the owner of a television station here in Venezuela. His name is Gustavo Cisneros (*acclamation*) and he is one of the people most responsible for what is happening in Venezuela, one of the most responsible, and I accuse him before the people and before the world of being a coup plotter and a fascist!" (*Applause and acclamation*)

Mr. Gustavo has been going around saying, in meetings over there and in other parts of the world, that he will not rest until Hugo Chávez is gone from power or dead. (*Acclamation*) Well, Mr. Cisneros is mistaken. A thousand years can go by, and he can spend all of the money he has, and he can use all of the influence he has

around the world, but this here is not about Hugo Chávez, this here is about a people and a country called Venezuela! (*Applause and acclamation*)

And so we Bolivarians, we revolutionaries, are not frightened by the threats made by any oligarch, no matter how much money he has and how much power he thinks he has. Here there is courage and dignity to defend the honor of the Venezuelan people! (*Applause*)

They are the ones without dignity. They are the ones without a soul. They are the ones incapable of feeling that thrilling hurricane of love for their own homeland. They do not have a homeland. We do have a homeland, and it is called Venezuela! That is our homeland! (*Applause*) The sacred homeland given to us by God, a sacred territory, a sovereign people and sovereign laws. (*Applause and acclamation of "Ooh, ah, Chávez isn't going!"*)

There are also many who have said that I should resign from the government (*acclamation of "No!"*), because, according to them, the leaders of the opposition – and they all talk like parakeets, or rather like parrots, from sunrise to sunset, they're like a bunch of parrots constantly nattering and spouting any nonsense that comes into their heads – among the many things they say is that I am no longer governing, because I have lost the ability to govern (*acclamation*), that there is no government, that the people do not want me any more. (*Acclamation*) They have gone so far as to say that more than 80 percent want me to go. (*Acclamation of "No!"*) Well, they are the same ones who say that the best television channel in Venezuela, Channel 8, is only watched by 2 percent of the population. (*Acclamation of "No!"*) They are the same ones who say

that more than 80 percent of the people are asking for me to go. (*Acclamation of "No!"*)

Now, we are here not only remembering Zamora and strengthening our revolutionary conscience. We are also here governing. We are here at this ceremony handing over the deeds to land. These are the acts undertaken by a government, ratifying the direction of change, and that is what hurts the oligarchs, because there is finally a government that does not bow down to that oligarchy. There is finally a government that works for the people, that serves the people. There is finally a truly free government that obeys the popular mandate. They got used to having governments that they could dominate, where they named the presidents and they named the ministers and they took the oil money and left the people with hunger and poverty.

Now there is a government handing over land, handing over credits. A woman here told me that she has been working the land for over 30 years, and for the first time ever she is being granted a credit of five million bolivars. It is a small amount, but she will surely work miracles with that small amount of credit. These are also credits with low rates of interest, not the speculative rates from some private bank. And in addition, they are being given a grace period and all the possible payment facilities.

We will continue moving in this direction, giving land to the peasants, giving credits to the peasants, giving machinery to the peasants, supporting producers. And not only small producers, but also medium and large ones, as long as they are genuinely working for Venezuela, as long as they are nationalists who care about the homeland, and

do not go around joining conspiracies and plotting coups to deny their food to the people, but, on the contrary, are working to produce food for the people. We will fully support all national producers; we will fully support all true national business owners who want to work together with the government and together with the people, to lift the Venezuelan economy and foster the development of Venezuela. (*Applause*)

Now then, to begin wrapping up this message we are broadcasting from San Carlos on national radio and television to all of Venezuela and the world, by satellite, I should also say the following: This government that is governing today has handed over, as I have already said, thousands of hectares of land, million of bolivars in credits, and, in addition, today we have handed over an apartment complex, 240 modern apartments built by the revolutionary government, with the support of the governor and the people of Cojedes, who built these 240 apartments through INAVI (the National Housing Institute). There are ten apartment buildings in all, and each apartment is 63 square meters in size with three bedrooms, a bathroom, combined living room and dining room and all the facilities needed. These apartments cost around 14 million bolivars, I have been told, but the revolutionary government is subsidizing over half the price and these families end up paying only between five and six million bolivars for a tremendous apartment. (*Applause and acclamation*)

Around 3.6 billion bolivars were invested in these apartments, and now they will benefit 240 families from San Carlos and other parts of Cojedes.

Today, as well, we are handing over the documents so that work can begin tomorrow on a series of large-scale construction projects that will help place Cojedes at the vanguard of the development of infrastructure in the country, and this has been a major effort. I want to recognize the effort of the governor, Johnny Yanes. I want to recognize his effort, his dedication. All those phone calls, all those visits to the Palace. "Mr. President, this project." "Mr. President, that project." We did not have enough money, but we finally managed to get it together, we lowered a few budgets, and today, thanks to God, we are here in Cojedes handing over the start-up money for a series of projects (*applause*), a whole series of projects. Part of them are for the national games that will be held here in Cojedes at the end of the year, and, God willing, I will come here for the opening ceremonies of the national games here in Cojedes. (*Acclamation*) We will be here with the grace of God and the help of Christ, my commander and lord.

God is with us! Who is against us? We walk along the path of God, we walk along the path of Christ, the Redeemer of the peoples and the Lord of Venezuela.

Now then, there are a series of projects which total 35 billion bolivars. What is the annual budget for the state of Cojedes? The annual budget for Cojedes is 64 billion bolivars, and the total cost of all the construction projects that will be undertaken this year, and will begin tomorrow – they have already begun, look over there – a total of 63 projects in all, will be 61 billion bolivars, in other words, almost the entire annual budget for the state of Cojedes. This is a contribution from the revolutionary government

for all of the men and women of Cojedes, because we know we owe a debt to this state, a debt of investments. And although we are going to begin the year with difficulties resulting from the terrorist conspiracy that has caused the country such great losses in income, nevertheless, God is great and we will do our work. You can rest assured that no matter how many economic difficulties we face, no matter how great the financial shortages we have, we will move ahead, because I never forget something that Bolívar said: "I am the man of difficulties." The more difficult they make things for me, the greater we will be, rising to the level of the difficulties. (*Acclamation*) Or, as Frederick the Great, the King of Prussia said, "The man who puts his heart into what he does finds resources where the incompetent give up."

We will put all of our hearts into what we do, and mine first of all, so that the Venezuelan people may move ahead, advancing victorious, breaking the darkness, breaking injustice, defeating poverty, defeating hunger, defeating the lack of housing, defeating the lack of land, because, to those who condemn me, that is my sin.

My only sin, the sin of which I am accused by the oligarchs, is simply to have been faithful to the hopes that you placed in me. (*Applause*) It is simply to have struggled, to be struggling, and to continue struggling, as I will continue struggling, with every fiber of my being, for justice for the people, for equality. Because I am one of the people in the world convinced that the only way to end poverty is the one that says, "If you want to end poverty, give power to the poor." (*Applause*) Power to the poor! Power to the people!

When we hand over lands; when we hand over credits; when we hand over machinery; when we create Bolivarian schools, for the children of the poor above all, because before they did not eat, and now they eat at school; when we create the local planning councils, what we are doing is giving power to the people. We are transferring back the power that was taken from the people almost 200 years ago when they betrayed the project of our Father the Liberator Simón Bolívar, who had the idea of giving power to the people, of justice and equality. No one can sway us from this path, brothers and sisters.

And so in a short while we will see sports complexes here, new stadiums, the remodeling of the baseball stadium, the construction of a new softball stadium, the construction of swimming complexes, the construction of various kinds of facilities, a cultural complex in San Carlos. We will build the Olympic village on this spot; it will be used to house the athletes from throughout the country, and after the games, these apartments will be sold at reasonable prices to middle and working class families from San Carlos and other parts of the state of Cojedes. *(Applause)*

More housing for the people! We are going to build 1200 houses over there, and apartments; 28 buildings, 252 apartments and 1200 houses, and all of this will remain here for the people, to be sold to them at reasonable prices.

This is a government of the people, this is a government for the people. This is not a government of the oligarchy, nor is it a government for the oligarchy, because the first commitment of a democratic government is to the

people that elected it, and, above all, the neediest among those people. The poor, the poorest, the middle classes.

Yes, all of this, dear friends: housing for the people, schools for the people, hospitals for the people, rooms for the people, cultural complexes for the people, credits for the people, land for the people, life for the people.

From San Carlos, we say: Viva the Venezuelan people! *(Acclamation of "Viva!")*

From San Carlos, we say: Viva the Bolivarian people! *(Acclamation of "Viva!")*

From San Carlos, we say: Viva Ezequiel Zamora! *(Acclamation of "Viva!")*

From San Carlos, we say: Viva Venezuela! *(Acclamation of "Viva!")*

From San Carlos, we say: Viva life! *(Acclamation of "Viva!")*

A revolutionary embrace to all of Venezuela, brothers and sisters; an immense embrace, free lands and men and women. Viva Venezuela! *(Acclamation of "Viva!")*

SPEECH GIVEN AT THE CEREMONY TO ESTABLISH THE NATIONAL FRONT TO DEFEND THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Caracas Polyhedron, January 11, 2003

(He and the assembled crowd sing the national anthem)

Long live Venezuela! *(Applause and acclamation of long may it live!)*

Long live the Bolivarian Revolution! *(Applause and acclamation of long may it live!)*

Long live the Venezuelan people! *(Applause and acclamation of long may it live!)*

Long live the boys! *(Applause and acclamation of long may they live!)*

Long live the girls *(applause and acclamation of long may it live)*

Long live our education! *(Applause and acclamation of long may it live)*

So, well, we have been on national television for about half an hour now, and for more than half an hour we have been broadcasting to all of Venezuela. *(Applause and acclamation)*. Today, Saturday 11 January we are

broadcasting to all of Venezuela this message of peace, this message of joy, this extremely important message in the context of the historical process we are going through. It is, as we have seen a musical message, a multicolored message, a creative message which comes from all corners of Venezuela and it is, above all, a message from our children to the older people of Venezuela, to the adults of Venezuela; it is a message from the boys and girls, a message from the adolescents of Venezuela; it is a message from the very roots of our being.

Yesterday we were in Zamora, not to commemorate the death of Zamora, because Zamora did not die, Zamora became eternal and today is with us building the country of which the Liberators dreamt. Long live Ezequiel Zamora! (*Acclamation of Long may he live!*) Long live Simón Bolívar (*acclamation of Long may he live!*) Long live Simón Rodríguez, teacher! (*Acclamation of Long may he live!*)

Today 11 January, we are here in El Poliedro which is filled to the brim with patriots, mostly education professionals; with the primary and secondary school teachers of Venezuela, and my revolutionary, patriotic and Bolivarian greeting goes out to all of you, the true educators of the new Venezuela, the homeland's educators and, of course, my message also goes out from here to all the students of Venezuela. (*Acclamation*)

Long live the students! for they are the yeast in the delicious bread that will come from the oven. (*Applause and acclamation of long may they live!*) and long live students from the youngest, the one year olds from the

Simoncito Plan, up to the young men and women in Venezuela's universities (*applause and acclamation*).

Well, we have come, and thank you for the invitation that you sent me through minister Aristóbulo Istúriz, to this National Assembly in Defense of the rights of our boys and girls and of our young people to quality education for all, free, compulsory, quality education, education for freedom, education for justice.

We must remember. Yesterday we were talking about Zamora and we ratified and extended our revolutionary Zamoran consciousness, because Ezequiel Zamora is the inspiration for today's struggles and that slogan of free men and lands, elections for the people and a horror of the oligarchy was the slogan of the federal troops and the Zamorans back then in 1858, 1859.

Today in this National Assembly of educators, of students and of the people in defense of education how favorable is the climate for girding our Revolution's autochthonous and original ideology more firmly around ourselves. What better stage could there be for remembering that teacher of teachers, that immortal philosopher, that Socrates of Caracas, Simón Rodríguez, the eternal revolutionary, for ever the teacher of those of us Venezuelans who are battling for truth, for equality and for justice than an assembly to defend education? (*Applause*)

Once, Simón Bolívar wrote to Simón Rodríguez saying: "Oh my teacher, oh, my Robinson, I have followed the path that you showed me; you have prepared my heart for the great, for the good and for the beautiful". How sublime it is when a student speaks thus to his teacher. You

prepared my heart, teacher, for the good, for the great and for the beautiful.

Those are the teachers we need today in Venezuela, who will prepare the children for the great, for the good and for the beautiful, for the sublime, for the truth, for liberty. (*Applause*)

Now when we mount this stage and see and feel the boundless strength that is palpable here and we see these thousands of people, thousands of educators, of the people and students from all over Venezuela then I, a foot soldier in this battle, a commander in this battle, say to myself: "Now we have an army to fight this battle for Venezuela" (*applause and acclamation*). Now we have a force organized and ready for battle and this battle we are in, compatriots from all over Venezuela, is not just a political battle. No, it is much more than that, the battle we are waging today throughout the length and breadth of Venezuela is an historic battle and it even goes beyond that. And, we, today's patriots, must be equal to that battle.

We must understand that today's battle is an historic battle. Why do I say historic? Quite simply because what is at stake today is not a government nor one man nor one person, what is at stake today is the new century which is just beginning, what is at stake today is Venezuela's history (*acclamation*), what is at stake today is Venezuela's future. (*Acclamation*)

I am going to repeat it once again, we, all the patriots of Venezuela are forbidden to fail (*acclamation*). We cannot falter, we are forbidden to falter, defeat is forbidden to us, (*acclamation*), Failure is forbidden, I even dare to say, with God's permission, that we are also forbidden to

die. We are not going to die and we are not going to fail, (*acclamation*) we are going to live and we are going to triumph for Venezuela, for our future, for our people (*acclamation*), for our children, for our own sons and daughters, we are going to live and we are going to triumph for our most sublime hopes (*acclamation*). This is already written in the pages of Venezuelan history; it can be written starting from now, the patriots of Venezuela are going to live and are going to triumph. (*Acclamation*)

I am not saying this just for something to say. No, when I say that I am once again thinking of that episode in the February 12, 1814 victory, when José Félix Rivas —of course, that was one day, that slogan was for a battle; today's slogan is for the great war that we are waging—when José Félix Rivas said these words to some young students turned into soldiers by the whirlwind of the revolutionary war: "Men, we cannot choose between being victorious or dying, we have to be victorious so that the Republic may live". And that is what we say today, but not just for one day but for thousands and thousands of days, for all the days that this great historic battle for Venezuela lasts. (*Acclamation of: "Ah, oh, Chávez is not going to go!"*)

This slogan, obviously, has a deep meaning and it is not just that Chávez is not going away, which is absolutely true (*acclamation*), but that, in addition to that, this constitution is not going away either (*acclamation*), nor is this government is going away, and this people is never going away (*acclamation*), it has returned from the depths of time to never go away again. This idea is not going to go away. What we represent, me, what I am is a tiny straw in

the wind, what I represent is, simply, the voices and hearts of million. And we are those million, and this dream which is us, and this road that we have made came to Venezuela to stay and to put down roots for ever: a new undertaking, a new road (*acclamation*). This homeland is not going away; this homeland has come back to stay (*acclamation*).

But before you got me going with those cries, with that slogan of Ah, Oh (*acclamation*) what I was going to say was that I was remembering those years of 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998 when we were developing the idea and the concept of constituent, of constituent power and we were organizing that avalanche that was unleashed throughout Venezuela and which was no less than the awakening of the people's constituent power.

We were saying that the Constituent Assembly would not be just an episode but that we would not end the constituent process there; that the next part would be more difficult; that the longer and more difficult phase would start after drawing up the plan, designing it and making it the constitution. It was a question of turning the constitutional plan, the product of the constituent power that resides in the people, into reality, and that's what we are trying to do today.

The constituent power of the people, that is to say of all of you, must stay awake, organized and on the move because it is the only thing that will guarantee that the constitutional plan people will become a reality is the constituent power that originates in the Venezuelan people. That is what we are seeing today all across this land, the sovereign power of the people on the move in order to

guarantee that the precepts of the pacific and democratic revolution are put into practice.

Does anyone doubt that? (*Acclamations of "No!"*)

If anyone were to have any doubts — because there are some psuedoanalysts, as I call them, out there and they write everyday in the papers and talk everyday on the television channels of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Everyday they go about saying that Chávez, well he still has some support from the military and that is what is keeping him in power —some say— a general, a lieutenant, a soldier and that is what keeps him there, but he no longer has the support of the people (*applause and acclamation*). Pseudoanalysts! Well, one thing is what one wants and another is what can be done. If anyone had any doubts about what I am saying about the strength of the constituent power of the movement, the constituent power, in other words, the people, sometimes goes on the defensive. Sometimes they behave like rivers, sometimes rivers flow along like a calm backwater. Anyone could be fooled by the Arauca, for example, if they see it around La Rompía or El Orza. In some places the Arauca shows another face and seems to flow along calmly. Then, sometimes the current is full, fast and furious. Constituent power is like that. If anyone has any doubts, well, let them review the last 365 days in Venezuela.

A few days ago in a newspaper in our sister republic of Colombia a Colombian leader wrote that "Chavez has been faced with four strikes in one year, including the coup d'état and the last one is already in its thirty something day", and the question some are asking in Colombia is "And what is keeping Chávez there? Why is he still in

power?" Coup d'état, economic sabotage, oil sabotage, the media, economic powered but nevertheless, Chavez is still there. But the thing is that it is not about Chávez; it is about a people (*acclamation*) and some people still don't understand that. Nobody is going to bring down this people, and nobody will stop this people and the more they try to do so, the more Bolívar's gigantic people will awaken. (*Applause and acclamation of "Chávez, Chávez, Chávez!"*)

They are messing with nothing less than a sleeping giant (*Acclamation*). Yes, they are poking a sleeping giant in the eye, they are provoking a giant who was asleep but who awoke and stood up. This giant has already defeated empires on this same continent (*acclamation of Chávez, Chávez, Chávez, a united people will never be defeated!*)

Once, Simón Bolívar wrote a biography of another great Venezuelan, of the great Marshall of Ayacucho. Bolivar wrote a biography of Sucre. By the way, I would like to publicly invite the governor of Sucre state to accompany me so that we may pay homage to the ashes of the great Marshall of Ayacucho in the next few days in the capital of Ecuador where we will be when the new president of our sister republic, Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez (*acclamation*) takes over the presidency. However, on one occasion Bolívar wrote a biography of Sucre and sent it to be published. Well, let's make a wave, OK, let the wave start over here. There goes the wave. Now that's some wave!

Now in this biography Simón Bolívar wrote of Antonio José de Sucre, the masterful pen of Bolívar — Simón Bolívar, what a great writer and poet— ended by writing,

he ended by writing something like this, now listen carefully to this: "Posterity will show General Sucre with one foot in Pichincha and the other in Potosí, carrying the seal of Manco Cápac in his hands and gazing on the chains of Peru, broken by his sword".

Today we could use Bolívar's words to say: Posterity will represent the people of Venezuela with one foot in the Caribbean and the other in the Potosí, gazing on the chains of a thousand empires broken by its liberating and sublime sword. (*Acclamation*)

The peoples of this continent have their eyes and their hearts once again set on Bolivar's people. This is another reason why we cannot falter, because it is not even just an issue affecting our Venezuelan people but it is an issue affecting all our brother and sister peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. This analysis has already been made by people ranging from historically renowned intellectuals such as Eduardo Galeano and Mario Benedetti to workers' leaders. Million of indigenous peoples on this continent have their eyes on us and their hopes in the Venezuelan indigenous people's struggle for equality and justice; million of workers, of laborers, of soldiers, children, peasants, in a word, the humiliated people of this continent have their eyes and their hopes set on the Venezuelan people. We cannot let so many people down, so many million, so many dreams, so much hope and we are not going to let them down. (*Acclamation*)

Now well, we are here in an originating constituent power assembly in defense of education, in defense of the rights of our children, of our young people, of our adolescents. I could say this is an assembly of parents, our

teachers not just to defend, I would be more inclined to say to unite with our children, to unite with our young people. For they are already giving battle on their own behalf, the battle for their education, the battle for their future and the battle for their dignity. And we have to remember this; the Constitution says so, echoing the cries of a people and echoing the voice of the nation.

Our children are not like children used to be and we adults are not like adults used to be, no. They are the subjects of the law, and they have the right to express themselves out loud; as they are doing, in defense of their own rights. They are the actors in this history; they are also fighters, because this is all about them and their future.

The saboteurs, the coup plotters, the terrorists who wanted to destroy the country in April, who wanted to destroy PDVSA in December, are now trying to put the knife into the education of our children and our young people, now they are trying to wreck education. Of course, they will be defeated even more resoundingly than in previous battles, they will be more resoundingly defeated than in the April battle, they will be more resoundingly defeated than in the December battle, because now they are not going directly up against Chávez, because now they are not going directly up against the government, because now they are not going directly up against oil wells, now they are going directly up against our sons and daughters, the people of Venezuela's children. (*Acclamation*). Now we shall defeat them as overwhelmingly as possible. We shall wipe the floor with them. (*Acclamation*)

Talking of that, at first sight, the terrorist forces that are trying to stop Venezuelan education seem fairly puny. The people are beginning to send them their reply.

We have convened, for example, a national volunteer force in defense of education, and we reissue the call here today. All to the defense of Venezuelan education!

There have been parent's assemblies, representative assemblies as Minister Aristóbulo has pointed out., The whole country knows, for example, that in the state of Miranda there is no governor, what they have is a conspirator (*acclamation*), who wants to be president (*boos*) and this silly man has ordered the schools in Miranda to be closed, thus violating the rights of hundreds of thousands of children. But the people itself is already sending him a reply; in the last few days, in the valleys of Tuy, using popular parents and representatives' assemblies and patriotic teachers, the people have won back 10 schools in the valleys of Tuy. (*Applause and acclamation*)

OK, do the conspirators want the schools to be run by the people themselves? If this is what they want, then let's do it, let the schools be run, coordinated and directed by the people themselves (*applause and acclamation*). They people knows what has to be done with its schools and high schools.

In Los Teques too, six schools that were closed, by order of the governor conspirator, have been open by the people in an assembly of parent and representatives. I invite all fathers who are concerned about their children and are aware what education means for their children, all mothers who are concerned about their children and are aware what education means for their sons and daughters, I

invite them to come next Monday, I invite them. I am not only inviting Chavists. No, I am inviting all mothers and fathers whose hearts beat for their children, for their children's' future to unite, I am inviting Chavists and non Chavists, Venezuelan men and women consciously involved in the defense of our children's' future to come on Monday, gather at the doors of the schools that are closed and, acting as a popular assembly, to open the schools and take control of them, wherever they may be. Let it be the people themselves who do this. (*Applause and acclamation*) They can't handle this people, they chose the wrong people; a giant called Simón Bolívar's people, the Venezuelan people has awoken. (*Acclamation*)

At the same time I am sure that the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, headed by that revolutionary and friend, our compatriot Aristóbulo Istúriz (*applause*) and the Ministry of Labor, headed by our revolutionary compatriot María Christina Iglesias (*applause*) are taking the necessary administrative measures because, as we did with the PDVSA, we have already fired more than 1000 saboteurs in the last two weeks (*acclamation*). Anyway, we had to fire them for abandoning their posts and moreover, if we have to charge them, those high school principals, teachers who did not do their sacred duty (*acclamation*) with crimes of violating the constitution, then we will do it, we have no problems with that. And we will have to suspend their pay, Aristóbulo. (*Acclamation*). We don't have to pay salaries to people who don't work. And those governors and mayors who go about sabotaging things, we will have to stop paying them the

corresponding budget allocation. (*Acclamation*) Don't send them the money, What for? If they won't open the schools.

I have said the same to Minister Navarro, Minister of Higher Education, that if the University Council of the University of the Andes headed by the Dean arbitrarily decides to suspend classes, then the revolutionary government will also suspend the money to the University of the Andes, (*acclamation*) not one cent will be sent to him. They will not receive their salaries, not the Dean, not the professors, nobody. (*Acclamation*) That is the order I have given to the Ministry of Higher Education and to the Ministry of Finance and to the Treasury of the Republic; that if the Dean of the Central University of Venezuela, the home of learning which chases away the darkness, decides in an arbitrary and illegal way in a university council to close the doors of our most important home of learning, well then, the Bolivarian government will not send one cent to the Dean of the Central University of Venezuela. (*Applause and acclamation*)

And at the same time as the government is taking these decisions, the constituent power must be promoting the creation of a new kind of university. It seems that the time has come to transform the universities from within, to transform education from the very bottom of its historic structures, inherited from the old order?

Aristóbulo, I want us to check on those governors who were given or had the management of the schools transferred to them and who today are sabotaging those schools. We are going to look for some good lawyers to find a way to take control of education in those states and municipalities run by saboteurs, because education is the soul of the people. We cannot leave it to the base-born

whims of terrorists so they can make an attempt on the lives of our children, because education is part of life.

Bolívar put it well one day: "A man or a woman with no schooling is incomplete". Well, this is an historic battle. *(The crowd shouts slogans)*

Well they are many ways to govern, aren't there? I have always been a spokesperson and standard bearer for the way of reason, but with people like these, with terrorists, no reasoning is possible. They can be no reasoning with those who attack the heart of their very own motherland. *(The crowd does a "wave")* The wave. This is a crazy wave because it comes through here but nothing is happening.

The Revolutionary government is prepared, within the spirit of the Constitution of the Republic, to take any measures it has to take, and while on that subject, we are not preparing to take political, legal, economic, social or communicational measures. Well, the thing about the TV channels, the Bolivarian TV channels are back on air, *(applause)* and they are back to never leave again. In a few minutes we will be in La Vega giving more than 1000 land titles to urban land and we will be broadcasting from there, on the national channel, to all Venezuela, because this is the Revolution that moves forward by caring for the people and those most in need.

Now those who live in Caracas' poor neighborhoods and in poor neighborhoods all over the country are going to be the owners of the land on which they have been living for a long time, they are going to be the owners of that land where they built their houses, their dreams and their hopes.

We are going to continue to give the Revolution deeper roots, sisters and brothers. Faced with an attempt to shatter

the Revolution, there can be no other reply but to give the Revolution deeper roots. The Revolution is not up for negotiation, principles are not negotiable, revolutionaries make revolution, let us give the Revolution deeper roots, politically, economically, socially, ideologically. That is the task for this moment in our history. Let no one doubt it, let no one waver.

Bolívar said in 1810: "Let us lay the corner stone of South American liberty without fear. To waver is to lose". I say today, almost 200 years later, in the same city of Caracas and in front of the giant who has awoken, the Venezuelan people, let us lay the cornerstones of the Bolivarian Revolution without fear. To waver would be to lose. Onwards! Let us keep on fighting and let us keep on filling our history with light, with victory, with joy and with dreams! *(Acclamation)*

They want to halt education? *(Acclamation of "No")* They will fail, because Bolivarian education will continue to rush forward for our children: Bolivarian education, Venezuelan education will continue to be more and more the basic axis of the beautiful revolution, because these boys and girls who sing, who dance, who dream are our very soul, they are the very embodiment of our dream. They are Venezuela in 2050 and it is for them that we will wage this great historic battle, and to them we will offer up this great historic victory of the Bolivarian giant, the Venezuelan people. *(Acclamation)*

I'll take my leave before night falls because we are going to La Vega. But I have been asked to hear the oath of those who will form what is being born here in this assembly, the National Front for the Defense of the Right

to Public Education, which, I understand, is being created by this mass of patriots who are here.

Well, I have been asked to do this and I do so with all my heart. Lets us all, then, swear an oath before God and before our children.

Do you swear, members of the National Front for the Defense of the Right to Public Education, do you swear to obey and ensure that the Bolivarian Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the laws of our republic are obeyed and swear that, from this moment on, taking this constitution as your banner and weapon to spread out throughout the length and breadth of our huge country, to lead our people and our students in the great battle for the defense and promotion of Venezuela's public, free and compulsory education. (*Acclamation of: "We swear!"*)

If you so do, let God and the homeland reward and go forth, then, to this battle and this victory.

Congratulations (*applause and acclamation of: "They will not come back!"*)

SPEECH AT THE URBAN LAND TITLING CEREMONY

La Vega, Caracas, January 11, 2003

(Sings the national anthem along with the people)

Long live Venezuela! (*Acclamation of "Long may it live!"*)

Long live La Vega! (*Acclamation of "Long may it live!"*)

Long live the Bolivarian people! (*Acclamation of "Long may it live!"*)

Long live the Bolivarian Revolution! (*Acclamation of "Long may it live!"*)

Here we are from Independencia (Independence) Street. What a beautiful, symbolic, name: Independencia Street! in La Vega. And from here a national message to the whole of Venezuela, because we are going out on the state radio and television network, for the whole country, from La Vega parish, Independencia Street (*Acclamation and slogans*).

Well, this ceremony this afternoon in La Vega is a historic ceremony, it's a historic ceremony and we ought to be aware of it; a truly historic ceremony, and I feel honored, happy, glad to be here in these streets of town,

where the people struggle, where the people fight, where the people overcome and where the people shall overcome. (*Acclamation*).

In this battle that we're waging, I said it at the polyhedron a while ago, also in a message to the nation and before almost 20.000 educators from all of Venezuela, who came down to hold a national assembly and created the Nation Front for the defense of children's right to education (*acclamation*). I said it at the polyhedron and I say it here in La Vega, in these streets vibrant with people, we're waging a truly historic battle, and this ceremony today falls within the battle for justice (*acclamation*).

Do the Venezuelans want peace? Yes, we do want peace, but we don't want the peace of the graves; we don't want the peace of slaves; we don't want the peace of the gag; the only peace –so said Christ- the only peace possible is through justice, and this is a ceremony of justice (*acclamation of: "Justice, justice, justice"*).

Simón Bolívar, our Father Liberator, once stated: "Justice is the queen of all republican virtues." And Bolívar's project was based, precisely, on the fight to the death for life. But, as we all know, Bolívar was betrayed; Bolívar was expelled from Venezuela by the oligarchy that took hold of the country, and he, who was precisely the Liberator, wound up humiliated, wound up expelled from his own motherland; and he went to die, almost alone, in Santa Marta, on 17 December 1830.

Today the Venezuelan people has revived Bolívar's dream of justice (*acclamation*); today Bolívar has returned with his banner of justice; today Bolívar has returned and is

here in the streets of La Vega, and Bolívar is the people of Venezuela (*acclamation*). This is Bolívar.

Simón Bolívar, the greatest man in our America has returned and has awakened along with his people who were humiliated over almost 200 years, by a vulgar oligarchy that took hold of all the wealth of Venezuela. This is why we are here today, waging the battle that we're waging; and at this battle –I've said it fellow countrymen—at this battle for the future, at the battle for our children, there's no room for defeat. We have only one slogan: To prevail! That's our slogan. We shall prevail! (*acclamation*). We shall defeat any attempt by the oligarchy to curb the Bolivarian Revolution, like we defeated them already in 1998; we defeated them in 1999 at the election polls; we defeated them in 2000 again at the election polls; in 2001 we defeated them again; and in case they were not yet satisfied, in 2002 they gave us a coup d'état and we swept them in less than 48 hours (*acclamation*). We defeated them in the streets and defeated them in the barracks, and we'll defeat them anyplace they wish to put up a fight against the people (*acclamation*).

They wanted to put up a fight in the oil fields; we defeated them too in the oil fields (*acclamation*). They want to put up a fight in schools; we shall also defeat them in schools (*acclamation*). They want to put up a fight in industries and stores; we shall defeat them, too, in industries and stores (*Acclamation*). They want to put a fight in banks; we shall also defeat them in banks (*acclamation*).

Anyplace the historical, treacherous and pretentious oligarchy, that humiliated these people for so long,

anyplace and with the weapons that they choose, we shall make them bite the dust of history (*applause and acclamation*). There is no negotiation with the oligarchy (*acclamation of "No!"*), because the homeland is not negotiated (*acclamation of "No!"*), because dignity is not negotiated (*acclamation of "No!"*), because principles are not negotiated (*acclamation of "No!"*). What we are now starting is a process to deepen the Bolivarian Revolution; difficult times are coming on. And what is that for us, Bolivarians and revolutionaries who have been 500 years battling against thousands of difficulties? Difficult times are coming on and the people need more unity, more cohesion and a greater ability to fight in every field.

The Venezuelan people have awakened, have stood up, and the Venezuelan people—I've said before—are a giant, the Venezuelan people have already defeated empires on this continent (*applause and acclamation*), the Venezuelan people have conducted historic battles, some of the most brilliant pages in world history.

These are people used to fighting for their liberty, for justice and for dignity; and we're here today, on our feet and together, putting up another great fight; but it's a fight that shall define the next 200 years of our history; it's a battle for the lives of our sons and daughters, of our small children, of our grand-children; it's a fight for the Venezuelan territory, because what the coup plotters, the terrorists, want is to give up the Venezuelan territory to big world corporations. And this is a holy territory, where our ancestors lie buried and where we shall lie some day (*applause and acclamation*).

This territory is not for sale or negotiation, because the coup plotters and terrorists are trying to destroy the State. We, on the contrary, are building the foundation of a true democratic State of justice and law, and this ceremony today bears witness to it, this ceremony today, in which we have delivered the titles of urban land, and I feel happy—as I already said—and I thank God, my Lord; Christ, my Redeemer; Christ, our Father; Christ, who came to the world to fight for justice and defend the oppressed and the weakest, I thank Him because he has let me, through these hands, these peasant's hands, these soldier's hands, start to do justice (*acclamation of: "Justice!, Justice!, Justice!"*), and I also thank so many fellow countrymen who have worked so hard so that this day today should come true, so many fellow countrymen who have organized themselves into urban land committees. I congratulate you all, because without you, this would have been just impossible (*acclamation*). I can't thank you enough. This is an example of the new democracy that we're forging in Venezuela, a democracy for the elite, a democracy for the people, from the grassroots, a participatory and leading-role democracy.

I remember the 4th of February of 2002, when we signed at the Military-Historical Museum, in the historic La Planicie barracks, the decree whereby this process of justice for the people was opened, to start to deliver urban land titles to the inhabitants of the neighborhoods and urban areas in Venezuela, and in less than a year, look where we are. Thousands of urban land committees have been organized and they have done an extraordinary cadastral job. They have taken sketches of the streets, houses; look

what beautiful houses there are here in La Vega! We will broadcast, on the state national network, those images of these beautiful houses in La Vega (*applause and acclamation*). These buildings made by the people themselves are smiling buildings –so was saying María Cristina— multicolored buildings, full of children, of happiness, of men and women. How beautiful La Vega is! How beautiful it is and the streets of this town are! This has been built over decades, and now we're taking a very important step forward, when we have given you the urban land titles, because this is part of the Venezuela's historic process of justice.

Here came, in the 20th century, thousands of families from all of Venezuela: from the Andes, from the plains, from east and west; because over there in the provinces, the landowners took hold of the best lands and left the people landless and moneyless, without credit or support. Many people came down from Tachira, many people came down from the Manzanares river banks, or from the Apure plains, looking for jobs, looking for a piece of land, and here they gradually sowed lives –all these women who went by, receiving their land titles. Especially those who have been in this life for a longer time and have greater experience told me that most of them were came from the provinces; they came here when they were just girls, with their families, with their parents, with their brothers and sisters, and here they stayed, here they got married and here they gave birth to their children, and here they saw the birth of their grand-children, and here they put down roots (*acclamation*), where as a minority of Venezuelans took hold of the wealth of oil, gold and so many riches the

Venezuelan motherland has. This is the history of the Venezuelan 20th century (*applause*), a minority that grew richer and richer every day and a vast majority that was left adrift and that has been surviving over 100 years of solitude, battles, death, darkness and struggle.

Now, as the Bible says in Ecclesiastes, to everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven, there's a time to die and there's a time to live; there's a time to weep and there's a time to laugh. Well, now has come the time of the people, the time of justice of the Venezuelan people; this is the time that we're living (*acclamation of: "Justice!, Justice!, Justice!"*). And there's no turning back.

This ceremony today and these titles that we have handed over, more than 1.000 titles, as a result of everyone's work, mean a lot. Anyone could think: No, that's a piece of paper Chávez is giving. Yes, but it so happens that it is a paper, a registered title of ownership; the State, the republic and the government of which I am the president is doing justice and is making the poor the owners of their land, so that nobody can ever again come and ride roughshod over them; so that nobody can ever come again and try to get them out; because now that land belongs to your, to your children, to your grand-children and to the future generations of your family (*acclamation*).

From the juridical point of view, you're becoming, from this day on, the owners of that land, and that land, also, is worth money. A square meter of land in this area is a square meter of land, and the plot that we've handed over today is worth several million bolivares, and it's now all yours (*acclamation of "Long live Chávez!"*). And, also, the

registered title of ownership will enable you to better organize into communities; will enable you to reorder neighborhoods and urban space, in order to live better everyday, now with greater legal security and with the protection of Constitution of the Republic and the laws of Venezuela, and with the support of the revolutionary government (*acclamation*). Because this, again, doesn't stop here; this is merely one step, because we will continue to move on, we'll keep supporting you all through Funda Común, for instance. And here's its president, to continue rehabilitating neighborhoods, streets, housing.

Here's, for example, General García Carneiro and his staff of officers (*acclamation*), who will continue to work with the people on the Avispa project, the now Bolívar 2003 project, to continue to support the poorest population.

I must say also that here is Mayor Freddy Bernal, and the city hall will continue to help, together with the Bolivarian and revolutionary government, with the armed force and the State and government institutions, supporting the villages, especially the neediest ones.

When I mentioned General Jorge García Carneiro and his officers, like Colonel Ernesto Rodríguez (*acclamation*), like Lieutenant Colonel Alcalá Clíver, who are here representing the Third Infantry Division and Caracas garrison command, I must speak as a soldier too, because I'm a soldier of the homeland; that's what I am indeed, a soldier (*acclamation of "Chávez!, Chávez!, Chávez!"*).

On this historic moment the homeland is living, I think there wouldn't be a more sublime moment for a soldier to feel he is playing the historic role that Bolívar's soldiers are supposed to play.

General García Carneiro, do feel proud to be here with the people (*acclamation*). General García Carneiro, and every one of your officers and soldiers, and, I tell you, my dear friend and comrade, that there's no better role for a soldier than to hold tight his soul together with his people and build freedom and justice (*acclamation*). Do feel, General García Carneiro, and all your officers, noncommissioned officers and soldiers, truly in the epicenter of Bolívar's dream. You all must feel that you're accomplishing with historic pride Bolívar's mandate, when in Santa Marta, betrayed, forsaken and humiliated by the oligarchy from here and also from Nueva Granada, after he was expelled, after he was humiliated and betrayed, that man went to die almost alone, and in his last proclamation he said: "The military must take up their sword in defense of social guarantees." Well here we are today, Venezuelan soldiers, taking up our swords to defend the guarantees of the people (*acclamation*). And in that last proclamation, the Father Liberator, taking his leave, said: "If my death contributes to a cessation of parties and a consolidation of unity, I shall quietly go down into my tomb." Calling us all to unity, to the unity of the people, to united struggle, to struggle for the common interest of all (*acclamation of "Unity!, Unity!, Unity!"*).

Today fellow countrymen of La Vega (*acclamation of "The people united shall never be defeated"*), fellow countrymen of Caracas and of all of Venezuela, in this message, broadcast over the state national radio and television network to the whole country, I call upon you to strengthen unity, because only united can we defeat the coup plotters and terrorists who are trying to break the

homeland apart. Only united can we definitely defeat the traitors to the homeland who are trying to stab her in the heart. Only united shall we ensure the future of our children.

We are starting the year 2003 (*acclamation of "They won't come back!, They won't come back!"*), and I ratify what I said in my year-end message, last December 31st, we're starting the Revolution's fifth year, 1999 was the first, 2000 the second, 2001 the third, 2002 and 2003, we'll come into the fifth year of Revolution (*acclamation*).

Now there's no bad fifth. As there's no bad fifth, this will be a good year, 2003 (*applause and acclamation*); but let me tell you this, fellow countrymen from every latitude, northern, southern, eastern and western Venezuela, the fact that this year is going to be good does not mean that it's going to be easy, no. Let us get ready for a difficult year; but this year will also be one of strengthening.

En 2002 –which was very difficult—we waged great battles and won great victories. In April we defeated a coup like never before any people had defeated it in 500 years of history (*applause and acclamation*). How great you are! What happens is that the plotters, what happens is that the terrorists, what happens is that the coup plotters don't realize that they have awakened an invincible giant whose name is Venezuelan people (*applause and acclamation*). And it so happens that the more the try to defeat the people, the stronger the people will be to defeat them (*acclamation*). As I already said, we have defeated them in any field and in any field we shall continue to defeat them. Defeat is their fate and our fate is victory (*applause and acclamation*).

Let us then get ready for a difficult year. The homeland's enemies will keep trying to destabilize.

Pay attention to this detail that General García Carneiro was telling me about a while ago. We had almost gotten things quite back to normal in terms of fuel supply to Caracas, to Greater Caracas; but yesterday there was a group of subversive individuals and terrorists that sabotaged three valves in the pipeline that brings gasoline from Carenero to Guatire, and then the gasoline supply had to be suspended. And this is why this morning we had again those long lines in Caracas.

I have ordered General García Carneiro, with the hunter battalions, to have the oil pipelines (*applause*), gasoline outlets and pipelines patrolled; and the hunter battalions are trained to defeat subversion wherever it hides (*applause and acclamation*).

Let the subversive individuals, let the terrorists know that they won't be able to manage Venezuela, or her people, or her armed forces. Here we are together, ready to defend the stability of democracy, of institutions, of the Constitution, the laws and the life of the Republic. They won't be able to manage us (*acclamation of "cleaning, cleaning in PDVSA!, cleaning, cleaning in PDVSA!"*). You may keep trying, but we'll show you every day...

Well, our adversaries –I have to thank them for it—are opening up opportunities that in the past we did not have (*applause*). In the armed forces, they gave us the opportunity –abiding by the law and the Constitution—to discharge over 100 coup plotter officers (*acclamation*), and today we have a much stronger and united armed forces,

and with leaderships committed to the Constitution, not to the coup plotters.

Moreover, in PDVSA they also gave us a great opportunity, because there they had a dictatorship of the so-called meritocracy, and now, after the oil coup, I said today that we had fired almost 1.000 PDVSA pro-coup officials (*acclamation*); but no. No, I was wrong, they are not 1.000, there are already 2.000 fired (*acclamation*), two thousand fired!, who, also, were being paid without working, and some had salaries of up to 10 million bolivares a month, at the expense of the poverty of our people. So all of them must be thanked, and I hope they keep giving us opportunities. Wherever they open a flank, we'll move on at victors' pace (*acclamation of: "Chávez!, Chávez!, Chávez!" and "Chávez!, friend, the people are with you!"*). That they don't want to open schools? OK, now they say they won't open schools. Well, I invite the people to take over schools (*applause and acclamation*), those schools that don't open, the representatives and parents organize the local power and take over the running of the school (*acclamation*).

Those teachers who will not comply with the sacred obligation of educating children will then have to be dismissed too (*applause*), and many retired teachers will have to be called so that they keep working, or special courses will have to be taught, day and night, as an emergency, to train really patriotic teachers, who feel the commitment to teach the children in schools, (*applause*) who are responsible as teachers, who feel what Marshall Sucre said: "Educating the peers is the noblest task a citizen can accomplish."

A teacher who lends himself to sabotage children's education does not deserve to be a teacher; that is no teacher. The title of teacher is too large on him. Well, they will have to be dismissed too, and principles who don't open. Universities that refuse to open will have to be divested of their budget appropriation so that they have no money then. We'll take it away from them, because if they don't want to teach, why then should they be sent any money? Those who don't teach their classes won't be paid any wages either; they mustn't be paid any wages. They might as well go get another job, but they're no good for being teachers. We need real teachers. Many soldiers have titles to be teachers, so we'll have soldiers teach children (*applause*). I myself will get down to teach in any school; but our children's education won't stop (*acclamation*).

That they want to close banks, they say. OK, we'll apply the law to those banks that don't open (*applause*); we'll apply a fine to those banks that don't abide by the law, and if they refuse to abide by it, then we'll have to remove their executives or take over. But they won't defeat us there on any battlefield. You know why? Because we have the truth on our side, because we have reason on our side, because morality is on our side and, further, God is with us (*applause*), because this is God's fight. Christ is with us. Who can cope with us?

Here we are fighting hard for the dignity of the people.

I congratulate you all (*acclamation of: "That's the way, that's the way, that's the way ruling is done; that's the way, that's the way, that's the way ruling is done."*)

You all know that I already belong to you (*acclamation*). Now, what is left of my life, what God

wills. This year I'll turn 49; I'm already pushing 50; well, I'll be turning 49. Every year that's left of my life I will devote completely to the struggle for the Venezuelan people, whom I love more than my life, because you are a heroic people, you are a beautiful people, you are a great, heroic and liberating people (*acclamation*).

Long live the Venezuelan people! (*acclamation of: "Long may it live!"*)

Long live the Republic (*acclamation of: "Long may it live!"*)

Long live Venezuela (*acclamation of: "Long may it live!"*)

Long live the Justice (*acclamation of: "Long may it live!"*)

Long live you all (*acclamation of: "Long may you live!"*)

Long live life (*acclamation of: "Long may it live!"*)

It has been a national message on the state national radio and television network for all of Venezuela.

Thank you very much, and until tomorrow (*applause and acclamation*).

COMMENTS RELATING TO CUBA DURING AN APPEARANCE ON THE PROGRAM ALÓ PRESIDENTE

(In response to the Statement of the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs of Cuba published as an
appendix of this book)

January 12, 2003

I'm going to make a comeback in baseball. I'm announcing my comeback in baseball, pitching against any team Fidel Castro wants to send here. (*Applause*)

We're going to send a greeting from here to Fidel Castro and to all the friendly presidents of the Caribbean: to Hipólito Mejía in the Dominican Republic; also to our friend Percival Patterson, in Jamaica; to the governor of Puerto Rico, since we are here facing the Caribbean; and most especially to Fidel.

Almost every day, the terrorists and coup plotters in Venezuela go after Cuba as a way of trying to attack Venezuela, using all kinds of lies, disparaging the people and government of Cuba. The day before yesterday I was

reading a communiqué that the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Relations was forced to issue in response to a new lie and hoax, hatched in the laboratories of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Now then, weren't they saying that Fidel Castro was at the helm of the *Pilín León*? "There goes Fidel, piloting the *Pilín León*." Fidel called me: "But how can they possibly say something like that, when the only boat I've captained was the *Granma*, and that was 40 years ago! I don't even remember how." And then they claimed that the crew was Cuba. They threw a potentially lethal grenade – fortunately no one was hurt – at the embassy of our sister nation of Algeria, attacking the territory of other countries of the world. They organized a *cacerolazo* (pots and pans protest) outside the Brazilian embassy, the Indian embassy. What kind of insanity is this?

That is why I continue insisting to the leaders of the Social Christian Party, the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, and the leaders of any other opposition group, that they assume a leadership role and guide this opposition sector of the population along the paths of democracy, of legal, peaceful protest, and not the path of fascism, of insanity.

I have mentioned the case of Cuba because they attack Cuba, they attack its president, they make up ridiculous stories, like the one about thousands of armed men being here. Yes, I do have a security detail, and they've said that there are Cubans in it. Since some of them are very dark-skinned, they say for example that Churio is Cuban, or that other one is Cuban. They're Cubans, Chávez's Cubans. They say that PDVSA is now going to be managed by Cubans, that the Cubans control who knows how many

things. They disparage the Cuban government. Ah! And that we give oil away to Cuba! That's a lie, a lie as big as the sun! We sell oil to Cuba, under the same conditions that we sell it to the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, and many other countries. These are sister countries, sister peoples, but they go after Cuba and attack the Cuban people, who are a dignified and noble people, and very dear to us. The Cuban people love the Venezuelan people, respect the Venezuelan people, and support the Venezuelan people.

Here is an example, a very young man, one of thousands of examples of how the Cuban people and the Cuban government support the Venezuelan people. That is why they deserve our respect, and our gratitude. We are not giving anything away to the Cuban people. However, the Cuban people do in fact give to us – and I'm talking from an economic and financial point of view. This is the truth, because of the agreement we have on medical treatment. Originally, we were supposed to pay for this treatment. But then, during a trip to Cuba, I visited a medical center in Havana, accompanied by President and Comandante Fidel Castro. The two of us went to visit a hospital full of Venezuelans. He had even given the order for Cuban patients to be sent elsewhere, so that almost the entire hospital could be used for Venezuelans and their families, since there is always a relative who travels with every patient. And that visit had a profound impact on Fidel, and on me, too, of course.

When he came here to Venezuela and we toured various cities around the country, Fidel was very moved when in Guanare, for example, a woman with a little boy

threw herself to the floor and cried, "Chávez, save my son!" The boy was later taken to Cuba, where they operated on his tiny heart, and he was saved. He was saved by God, but with the help of science.

After that visit to the medical center in Havana, Fidel was deeply moved, and while the two of us were in the car on our way back to the Palace of the Revolution, I remember how he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Chávez, even though we've signed an agreement that says you're supposed to pay us for all those operations and all those medicines, Cuba is not going to charge anything, because this is care for the people of a sister nation, and it makes Cuba and its people and government greater." *(Applause)*

And in fact, despite the immense difficulties facing Cuba, immense, they have not charged us a cent. And it is not only a question of surgeries, some of which are highly complex, but also the treatment, the medicines, and the costs for the relatives as well. Sometimes we send the *Camastrón* (the old presidential plane) – it's being refurbished, and will be ready soon – or we send a plane, or charter a plane, and we pay the airfares and all the travel costs. But the costs there are covered by the Cuban state, in other words, the Cuban people. That is why we feel they are great, noble and worthy.

He is just one example, but there are already thousands of examples at this point, since this agreement has been in effect for three years now.

Take a look at what I am going to show you. I am going to show it, and it's not that we like showing this kind of thing, no, no. I am pleased just to know, and I know

through the reports I receive, and sometimes I greet the people who come back, who have recovered or are recovering. But this young man, who is a member of the armed forces, as well, came here and brought a greeting from some people in Cuba and from some other Venezuelans. And he even brought a picture showing what he was like before. I am going to show it. He is a second-class sergeant in the Venezuelan air force, Eric Vera, a young man, with a strange ailment, very strange! And here they were never able to do anything about it, despite all the different things they tried.

Look at what this young man looked like *(he shows a photograph)*, what he had on his forehead. When I met him, that's what he looked like. It was an awful thing. They had already operated on it, but it came back. He had run out of money, and he said to me, "Mr. President.." And I told him, "Son, let's go to Caracas." We put him on the list, he went to Cuba, and here he is.

How are you, Eric?

Eric.– Good evening, Mr. President.

Chávez.– How are you feeling?

Eric.– Fine, fine, thank God.

Chávez.– How is your family?

Eric.– They're fine, in Villa de Cura.

Chávez.– You told me you were from Villa de Cura.

Eric.– Yes.

Chávez.– You have children now?

Eric.– Yes, a son who's one and a daughter who's ten days old.

Chávez- Ten days, so you've just given birth, as they say. *(Laughter)* Congratulations to your wife. What's her name?

Eric.- María de Guadalupe.

Chávez.- María de Guadalupe, congratulations. She just had a boy?

Eric.- A girl.

Chávez.- And you have a son who is...?

Eric.- He's one.

Chávez.- And your wife went there with you? No, because she was pregnant.

Eric.- Yes, she did, but only for August, September and October, then my sister went.

Chávez.- How long were you in Cuba? Tell us about it.

Eric.- Five months. For three months they put an expanding prosthesis on my forehead, to stretch the skin; I had a defect on the front right side. For 13 weeks they injected me with 25 cc of a physiological solution through a valve, over the top of my head. When the right volume was reached they operated on me, and they did the whole operation of rotating the flap of skin. It's been a month and 10 days since the operation.

Chávez: And how do you feel?

Eric.- Great, great.

Chávez.- Are you back at work?

Eric.- Yes, like normal.

Chávez.- Look at that, a month after the operation and he's already working.

Now, fortunately, that malformation there only involved the skin and part of the frontal bone.

Eric.- I was in a car accident. The tires blew and I hit my head.

Chávez.- How long were you like that?

Eric.- Two years.

Chávez.- It was the same size?

Eric.- No, it kept growing, but in Cuba they reduced it and gave me a complete examination.

Chávez.- And they had already operated on you here?

Eric.- Yes, but they told me that nothing could be done about it.

Chávez.- They had told him that nothing could be done about it. And that's the same thing that has happened with a lot of people. "No, you're not ready. You should stay at home and wait." Or else, "Have you got 20 million on you? Get together 40 million and we'll see what we can do."

So this is an example. Thanks very much, Eric. You're a sergeant?

Eric.- I'm a second-class aircraft technician.

Chávez.- For how long?

Eric.- I graduated five years ago.

Chávez.- And how old are you?

Eric.- Twenty-six.

Chávez.- He's a kid, he has his whole life ahead of him. And now, in addition, they're going to do another operation on him, plastic surgery so that you won't even see the scar from the other operation. God bless you! Give my best to you wife and family, your children.

Eric.- Thank you, Mr. President.

Chávez.- All the best to you, and thank you, Eric. (*Applause*). And thanks to Fidel and the Cuban doctors and nurses and all the people who work with our patients who go over there. A plane leaves every week to take people there and bring people back. And please note, we don't give this a lot of publicity. We really should. Why? Because, as they say, Render therefore unto God the things which be God's, and unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's.

They're forever saying on the television, on the radio, that we send people to Cuba to be trained. They started saying that one of those boys who were killed in Los Próceres by those subversive parapolice and paramilitary groups had received training in Cuba, that he was a member of Chávez's terror squads. They say all of this, and it gets spread around the world, and it comes out of the laboratories of the so-called media, owned by these licensees. They are doing terrible damage to the country, and they've forced us to start opening files for administrative proceedings, in order to adopt decisions when they need to be adopted.

SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE CEREMONY TO TRANSFER THE PRESIDENCY OF THE G-77

United Nations, New York, January 16, 2003

Good afternoon gentlemen,
Mister Secretary General,
Excellencies,

I declare this Group of 77 meeting to hand over the presidency of our G-77 for the period 2000 officially open

Excellencies, we have the draft agenda for this session in front of us. I wish to know if anyone has any comments on the agenda. Since there are no comments, the draft agenda is adopted.

Now I give the floor to myself (*laughter*) to give an account of the past year, 2002, and hand over this responsibility to the Kingdom of Morocco.

Your Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations; Your Excellency Mr. Mark Malow Brown, Director of the United Nations Development Program; honorable delegates from the G-77 member countries; Mr. Secretary and members of the Executive

Board of our Group; Mr. Roy Chaderton, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and other members of our official delegation; Mr. Ambassador Milos Alcalay, Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations; ambassadors of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to different UN bodies; distinguished guests specially invited to this session; representatives of the media; ladies and gentlemen.

A year ago, in a similar ceremony, I had the great honor of taking over the presidency of the Group of 77 with the unanimous support of 134 countries, united in the lofty cause of solidarity, unity and development.

Today I come again to this UN forum, to the G-77 to hand over the presidency to the Kingdom of Morocco, and to review with you what has and has not been achieved during Venezuela's presidency of the G-77.

As I hand over the presidency to the Kingdom of Morocco, I wish them every success, and offer my words of encouragement to King Mohammed VI, in the assurance that, with the assistance of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco, Mr. Mohammed Benaissa and that of Ambassador Mohammed Bennouna, they will be able to defend the historic roots of our group, and the struggle and demands of the developing world.

As 2003 begins, please accept my expression of faith in the future of our people, in our quest for the noble ideals we have set out to achieve. In order to do this, the principles that have guided my action and our action in the G-77 have been based on two main pillars: the United Nations Millennium Summit and the G-77 Havana Summit.

Both declarations, adopted by world leaders, set forth the United Nations commitment to and the G-77 support for designing a concrete plan of action and the guidelines on how to achieve a better world.

As I pointed out a year ago, if we had to adopt a constitution for the Group of 77, these two documents would become the fundamental guidelines to achieve the better world we all long for.

Despite the many difficulties Venezuela faced during the year 2002, and the world as well, for that matter, we have been able to carry out our mandate as chairman of the G-77 with firmness and conviction thanks to your support, brothers and sisters, and we have made our best effort to carry out the mandate entrusted to us.

I have proudly spoken for the developing, underdeveloped and poor world.

At the various summits held during 2002, such as that summit in Monterrey, we stressed the great need to finance overall human development, that bears no resemblance to savage neoliberalism, or an economic vision of a reality that demands so much more.

We then proposed, just one year ago, at that same Summit in Monterrey, the establishment of an International Humanitarian Fund to really fight poverty, hunger, desertification, endemic diseases, in other words, death.

We proposed, there in Monterrey, that this International Humanitarian Fund could have several sources of income; for example, a substantial reduction in the arms build-up in the planet, or a substantial percentage of the external debt that we, the poor countries of the world, the

developing countries, continue to pay to the developed world and international institutions.

The Venezuelan case is just one of many. In the last four years Venezuela without missing a payment has paid 20 billion dollars of a debt that seems eternal, because 20 billion dollars have been paid, and the debts is still the same but with a tendency to increase; an eternal debt. This is an issue that, sooner rather than later, we will have to face with courage and steadfastness, if we are to find a real solution to the serious problems of the poor and developing world.

The immoral external debt mechanism sucks our people's blood.

Another source of finance for that International Humanitarian Fund is the profit from drug trafficking, and the big profits from corruption that have filled the coffers of many an international crook.

Several Venezuelan millionaires who plundered our country live here, in the United States, and they also live in other parts of the world. It would be very difficult for them to prove where their great wealth came from

The new President of Ecuador, Lucio Gutiérrez, has proposed an international agreement to hunt the corrupt all over the world and to recover the huge profits sometimes found in tax havens and in secret accounts all over the world. If we could recover this capital, return it to the countries it came from and use a percentage of it to establish this international humanitarian fund, that would be a very effective and efficient way to fight hunger, death, corruption and poverty.

We continued to stress those issues. In Johannesburg, as spokesperson for the G-77 we suggested much the same as in Monterrey, only that this time we dwelt on the central issue of that summit. Ten years after the Earth Summit in 1992, and in a very self-critical spirit, we said that not only are we nowhere near the goals set at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, but we are increasingly moving further away from them.

Another lost decade in which world hunger, exploitation and inequality increased, a situation made worse by the appearance of AIDS which is annihilating whole generation and made worse moreover by the irrational attempt —after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall— to impose a single model on the world, one sole ideology. People said there was no other choice but neo-liberalism. This aggravated the world's ills and plunged million more into poverty in the ten years between Rio de Janeiro, 1992 and Johannesburg, 2002.

In Johannesburg we also said that it worries us to read reports and documents that seemingly try to hide or sugar-coat this tragedy, or at least to minimize it. In Johannesburg we also asked people to think about and modify the very concept of sustainable development. For, as we said in Johannesburg, the prevailing concept of development in the planet is not sustainable at all, and this has been clearly demonstrated.

We need to rethink our development models and make human beings their focal point. In this regard, Venezuela acknowledges and will continue to acknowledge the great efforts made by the United Nations Program for Development, and my government has strictly followed the

recommendations made by the United Nations through its Program for Integral Development: drinking water, schools, incomes, education and health. This is the most important thing, much more important than budgetary deficit, much more important than the external debt.

Jesus Christ said: Man, not the economy, must be Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end. We have turned human values upside down and we are suffering the consequences all over the planet.

We have said, even in Venezuela, that the present world is not viable. If we want the world to end, then let us keep going down the same road, the road to hell, to the very depths of hell. There will be no peace in the world while there is no justice. The only way to peace is justice, so the Bible says. We aspire to a high degree of equality.

I am convinced that at the beginning of this century, with the terrible events that have shaken the world, every country on earth and every world leader will become increasingly aware of this reality.

Violence, terrorism must be fought, but not only with weapons, not only with bombs, not only with wars, because that would mean fighting the effects and not the causes. We must change our outlook, as we said, and we said it again at the Johannesburg Summit. In Johannesburg, when we spoke on behalf of the G-77 we made another criticism, and we are convinced we were right. I am convinced that these summits must be rethought because they are of virtually no use when it comes to the goals we have set ourselves.

Surprisingly, in Johannesburg, for example, we saw the idea of setting up an international humanitarian fund

adopted unanimously by 30, 40 or more Heads of State and/or Governments at a round table, but it could not be included in the summit's conclusions; it's unbelievable. We Heads of State give our views, adopt ideas, but it is really hard to have them included in the conclusions or commitments. So we wonder: if heads of state, heads of governments are not capable of influencing the results of a summit what are summits for? And we also wonder, thinking self-critically: if when heads of state and/or government take decisions, and these decisions are adopted, such as those adopted at the Millennium Summit, if even then we are not capable of taking decisions to meet the goals set, but rather go our separate ways to solve our own problems in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Oceania or Asia, what then what are summits for if they do not give rise to a collective will to battle against the evils we suffer? We said all this and much more during 2002, a storm-swept year for us, when we had the honor of representing this important group in every world forum we have attended.

On the one hand, we had planned several G-77 high-level meetings and expert meetings to be held in Caracas during the last quarter of the year 2002 with the purpose, first and foremost, of institutionalizing and giving more internal cohesion to the Group of 77, and on the other we tried to work out the details for the Group's next summit meeting. We couldn't hold the meeting that had been planned at the beginning of 2002 and this is one of our failures.

Venezuela also acceded to the presidency of the Group of 15 during in the middle of 2002. We have not been able to hold the G-15 summit for reasons beyond our desire to

contribute to the unity of the south, the unity among developing countries, the renewal of South-South dialogue and cooperation, the renewal of North-South dialogue, and joint efforts to find solutions to these world dramas that, in one way or the other, plague us all.

Actually, Venezuela's internal situation had a big impact, though this is not by way of an excuse. In spite of everything, we are satisfied. We bravely took up the work inside G-77 and G-15, we made great efforts and had some modest results. But our internal situation really did have a substantial impact on some of our goals.

The internal situation in Venezuela –I was joking in a friendly manner with the Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, I told him that he is partly to blame for the internal situation in Venezuela (*laughter*), for the simple reason that we in Venezuela have set out with strict discipline, the discipline of one of the most disciplined armies ever in the history of the world, to pursue and achieve the goals of the Millennium Summit, putting humankind back on center stage.

Venezuela's sin in recent years has been to wage a thorough battle against inequality; our sin in Venezuela is to dare, as we have done and continue to do, to make our words match our deeds in our daily actions; Venezuela's sin has been to dare, for the first time in a hundred years, to go up against the ostentatious privileges of an stupid and insensitive oligarchy that for a hundred years led a people sitting on gold and oil to a degree of poverty that affects more than 80 percent of our population. That is our sin. Our sin, in the eyes of that Venezuelan oligarchy, is that we have been able to keep our promise to the people that

elected us to run the country in the interests of the majority.

Almost one year ago I was here, acceding to the presidency of the G-77, when a coup d'état that took place a few days after the Monterrey Summit was being organized in Venezuela. We had been warning the world, we had been telling the world and many friends about this.

Who planned that bloody coup d'état? The Venezuelan elite with foreign contacts; the owners of private TV stations in Venezuela; four big TV stations, already called by people... You know what the people call them? The four horsemen of the Apocalypse. In the name of freedom of expression, the proprietors of those TV stations trampled on truth and led and continue to lead the conspiracy because it has not ended.

I will give you an example of what happened in Venezuela on April 11, 2002. I was taken prisoner and taken to a Venezuelan island in the Caribbean. But before that, the only state TV station was taken off the air by the coup plotters, helped by cutting edge technology. The four horsemen of the Apocalypses spread out to the garrisons and places where the coup plotters had gathered; there was not a single place where the civilian and military coup plotter had gathered where you would not find a TV camera, backed by microwaves and satellites ready to go on the air. They had their equipment in place at the Palace, and even while I was still there they gave orders to the journalists not to let the President of the republic go on air.

Later on, when I was already imprisoned, they began to broadcast a big lie to the world, one of their many big lies. I refused over and over again to sign the resignation

presented to me by the coup plotters. Even though they threaten to kill me, I told them: "I will not resign the power given to me by the people, so you can do whatever you wish to me." So they sent me to prison. Next morning, the four horsemen of the Apocalypse were using satellites broadcast the resignation of the President to the world. They were reading a decree they themselves had drafted and I had refused to sign. They were saying that I had signed my resignation and had left the country, while they knew very well that I was imprisoned in an island.

They refused to broadcast any other news than that they themselves had written. They imposed a media blockade on Venezuela that was breached thanks to the brave action of some foreign journalists, who risking their lives, were able to send out part of the truth to the world. Then, few hours later, despite the huge misleading campaign, despite that great lie, the people, which is wise — the old saying is right: "The voice of the people is the voice of God"—and can smell the truth a mile away, took to the streets by the million, especially the poorest sectors with only one weapon: the Bolivarian Constitution, their dignity and their moral right to do so. The ragged and the wretched, those who while living in a rich land were reduced to extreme poverty, and those who in the last four years have felt that finally, after such a long time, they have a government which is not perfect, a government that makes a lot of mistakes, but is unwaveringly committed to give them back life, health, education, housing and dignity.

Do you know, Excellencies, Mr. Secretary General, what happened then, when the people began to surround the Government Palace where a dictator had given himself the

oath of office? The Chairman of the Chamber of Businessmen swore himself in as President —"I, holder of the highest office swear myself into office"—and did away with the National Congress, the Court of Justice and took all the power for himself, backed by the military coup plotters and the elite. When the people began to circle the Palace, the military bases and garrisons and took to the streets of Caracas, to the highways and the streets of the country's most important cities, do you know what happened? Do you know what the four horsemen of the Apocalypse did when the peasants took to the roads, when the indigenous population came out from the forest, when the students took to the streets, when the workers took over the factories and the tyrannical government began to collapse? They went to the TV studios and began showing films and Tom & Jerry cartoons, while the people was being massacred and dozens of people were being killed on the streets. That was not news for them.

They did not broadcast a single incident and then, they brazenly said that they did not do so because there was unrest on the streets. Well, any good journalist could say: then who has covered world wars and the great events that have shaken the world throughout history?

So for being loyal to that people, for being first and foremost faithful to God's supreme mandate —Love thy neighbor as yourself—, and to fight for equality and dignity, particularly for those who suffer the most; for being loyal to Venezuela's constitutional mandate, in the year 2002 we had to fight not only the April coup d'état, but many more attacks by that economic, media, and political elite, including attempts to assassinate leaders.

And finally, in December we had to fight these people's attempt to stage an oil coup, to paralyze the very heart of Venezuela's economy, using a technocratic elite that had managed our oil company since its foundation. They launched the biggest sabotage operation that any oil producing country has ever heard of. Almost all the top management abandoned the refineries, they put pressure on the workers to abandon their duties, they carried out electronic sabotage, blocked the computing system, stole the codes and altered the control systems that regulate the refineries operation.

I will give you an example so you can see the long reach of the criminal and genocidal hand of the fascist coup plotters —the age-old privileged elite—we are fighting in Venezuela.

All these oil installations have, of course, a temperature regulation system. Imagine that this big hall is a big refinery floor and that you have a computer system that regulates the temperature and does not allow it to get over 600 degrees Celsius, because temperatures higher than that endanger the refinery. Imagine what this people did. Before abandoning the control systems they set the temperature at 1000 degrees Celsius with the sole intention of blowing up the refinery.

We have had to go step by step, making a detailed check of all the systems, because what they left was a mine field in the refineries, the pipe systems, oil wells. They have done sabotage by remote control by shutting down the electric systems that feed the oil fields, affecting the oil production in Venezuela that reaches almost 3 million barrels, and we went down to 120.000 barrels. This

affected not only Venezuela but the United States as well, a country to which, for many years, we have been sending half a million barrels of crude per day, and we refine it here. It also affected countries like Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Guyana, brother countries from the Caribbean and Central America that can only cover half of their energy demand with the oil sold to them by Venezuela, on easy terms, based on agreements we have signed with these brother countries, who are poorer than us and do not have a drop of oil. The Venezuelan coup plotters don't give a damn about this, they cannot care less for the lives of other people.

But that's not all. They managed to shut down some milk processing plants, for example, because they own those plants. Big capitalists who closed down factories where milk for the children is processed so we had to import milk from Colombia. Then there were the big capitalists who own huge corn and rice stockpiles and closed them down and refused to process them, so we had to import corn from the Dominican Republic. They refused to take the cattle to the slaughterhouses and to process the meat. We had to buy cattle from Brazil. They sabotaged the ports; they imposed a blockade on us. They stopped almost all merchant vessels, threatened foreign vessels with sabotage if they dropped anchors in our ports. They are real terrorists and fascists. They want to force my people into submission through hunger; they want to force my people into submission through need. That is not all. They have even attacked the sovereign territories of embassies from friendly countries there in Venezuela, like the Embassy of Algeria, last week, just because President

Bouteflika , complying with an OPEC agreement to assist Venezuela with technicians and in any other way, sent a team of technicians to Venezuela. They hurled a grenade at the Algerian Embassy that endangered the lives of the Algerian ambassador and his wife and driver.

In late December, as soon as President Cardoso sent a PETROBRAS ship full of gasoline, because we were running out of gasoline, because the refineries were closed, they had been sabotaged, and Cardoso in a fraternal gesture sent a ship full of gasoline. Of course, we did pay PETROBRAS; we bought gasoline from Brazil in the same way as we sell it to them and to many other friendly countries. Well, the fascist attacked the Brazilian Embassy, as they had harassed the Cuban Embassy in April, when they destroyed their cars and wanted to invade Cuban territory, showing no respect for international law. The Indian Embassy was also attacked, just because we had hired an Indian crew to move a ship they had sabotaged. And we did not even hire them through the Indian Government, it was done through a private company, but nevertheless they attacked the Indian Embassy. This is pure fascism, this is total contempt for life, this is total contempt for ideas, this is total disrespect for others. And all this has been fueled by the mass media. This is poison that is being poured daily into some sectors, particularly the Venezuelan middle high and upper classes.

That is why, Mr. Secretary General and Excellencies, I feel the Venezuelan case should be studied.

Last night in Quito, before flying to this beautiful city of New York, I bought a book by Ignacio Ramonet, a prestigious intellectual who has studied these issues for

many years. And he reminded me of one of his books: *The Media Dictatorship*, which is about how the mass media – and Venezuela is a case in point—most of the time don't care about either laws or constitutions, they want to put themselves above the rights of the people, either to install a president or get rid of a president, to make economic profits, they are what is called the fifth estate. I think we will have to discuss one day, within the context of our quest for peace and justice. Many people don't dare touch the subject. In Venezuela we have unmasked them because we believe that this effort make a small contribution to the struggle for the dignity of the world's people who are so often trampled upon by media dictatorships of big corporations, that have a lot of power but no legitimacy whatsoever because nobody elected them, and who show absolutely no respect for the laws of our countries and absolutely no respect for the dignity of our peoples.

We have had to deal with all these things in Venezuela, and a lot more that I am not going to tell you about. And we keep on fighting them. We have defeated them and will continue to do so, because those who try to incite the military against this government, those who try to starve the people into submission, have forgotten many things when they are making their calculations. One thing they have not taken into account, because perhaps it has no value for them —since they do recognize the individual soul neither do they recognize the soul of a people— is that the Venezuelan Armed Forces are the same as ever, they are the same soldiers who under Bolivar defeated empires in this continent. This is the army that under Bolivar broke the chains of an empire that for 300 long years dominated

South America and the Caribbean. The army carries that seed within it. And they forget this little detail: the Venezuelan people which they are trying to starve into submission, is the same people which, crossed the Andes suffering from hunger and traveled all over South America, from the Caribbean up to Potosi, defeating empires. They have overlooked that minor detail.

The Venezuelan people is made of the same clay as the liberators of this continent, and is waging a great battle – not for itself— for the dignity of the Latin American people, for the dignity of the Caribbean people, and for the dignity of the people of the world, particularly those represented in the Group of 77, and especially the poor people of the planet. We are there, fighting the battle with our heart open to all of you.

Thank you very much (*applause*).

Appendix

STATEMENT FROM THE CUBAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Blatant fascist and treasonous lies about Cuba

The treasonous and fascist television station *Globovisión*, along with other privately owned Venezuelan television stations, throughout the day and night of yesterday January 8, have been repeating every 30 minutes, on average, blatantly provocative and false claims against Cuba, issued by the so-called Democratic Coordinating Committee. Among the three objectives put forward by this group to hold a demonstration in Caracas today, is the shameful claim that they need “to prevent the giving away of our most important resource to Cuba.” This is a gross attempt to implicate our country in the internal affairs of Venezuela.

This new and treacherous action is aimed at confusing the brotherly Venezuelan people, just as they tried to do last April during the failed coup when constitutional President Hugo Chávez was kidnapped, resorting once

again to the argument that oil is sent to our country even though Cuba does not pay for it.

These are the facts:

On October 30, 2000, the presidents of Cuba and Venezuela signed a Cooperation Agreement between our two nations. As part of this agreement, a contract was signed on November 22 of that same year for the sale and purchase of crude oil and oil derivatives, establishing the terms and conditions for the supply of up to 53.000 barrels a day for a period of five years. The terms and conditions agreed upon with Cuba are equally or less favorable compared with those set for the rest of the countries of Central America and the Caribbean, which are also beneficiaries of the Caracas Agreement.

The shipments began in December of 2000 and proceeded uninterrupted until April 11, 2002, the date of the failed fascist coup. During this period, 25.589.000 barrels were received.

In compliance with the provisions of the contract for that period, payments totaling 439.7 million dollars were made, in cash, at world market prices. The deferred payments, as per the formula agreed upon, would begin to be made at the end of the current year, 2003.

The suspension of supplies in April was the sole responsibility of the putschist sectors, which included a group of PDVSA managers. On April 5, 2002, there were four ships waiting to transport fuel to Cuba. Three of them were ready on April 9, but only one could leave on the morning of April 11. Two shiploads, by then the property of the Cuban firm Cuba-Petroleo (CUPET) as shown in the contract, were sold to third parties through a unilateral

decision by the PDVSA authorities; the fourth ship was never loaded. These events occurred two days before the fascist coup of April.

As a result of this action, Cuba had to immediately set out to purchase the oil and oil derivatives that the country needed, through intermediaries and at much higher prices, given the urgency and the high cost of shipping resulting from longer distances, since some shipments could be contracted only in Europe and Africa. There were even shipments that could not be brought to Cuba because no ships were available, due to the notorious restrictions imposed by the U.S. blockade on vessels that call on Cuban ports.

To provide some idea of this situation, due to the interruption of the supply of Venezuelan crude oil it was necessary to shut down the second most important refinery in the country, that of Santiago de Cuba, from April to September. This created the need for additional oil derivative imports at higher costs, and for the use of the country's reserves kept for exceptional circumstances. The extra expenditure of hard currency for this reason alone totaled 85 million dollars, which added to the adverse effects the whole situation had on the economy at large and the population.

In July of last year, a renegotiation agreement was reached with PDVSA. This agreement provided that shipments would resume in August, although that did not happen until September, and then including the unfair payment of 13 million dollars in arrears imposed by the oil company. This was accepted by Cuba, whose position was one of full understanding of the difficulties faced by the

Bolivarian government of Venezuela, despite the fact that our country was in no way responsible for the delayed payments.

Then, from September to November of 2002, another 4.444.000 barrels were received, with payments made of 96.4 million, the exact amount that Cuba was obliged to pay during this time; the payments were made without the slightest delay.

Last December 2, in the midst of the new attempts at a coup d'état, the shipments committed in the Caracas Agreement were once again interrupted, with similar consequences to those of the period from April to August. In other words, the refinery in Santiago de Cuba was again shut down, and the country was forced to turn to intermediaries and to pay higher costs, at the same time that a decrease in production by PDVSA had additionally caused an increase in oil prices on the world market and a physical shortage of products in the Caribbean region. The failure by PDVSA to meet its obligations has cost our country more than 200 million dollars in economic damages, in the very same year that it was already facing the adverse circumstances resulting from a combination of the worldwide economic crisis with the U.S. blockade, and the considerable damage caused by three hurricanes that accounted for more than 2.5 billion dollars in losses for our people.

Following the paralysis and boycott of the Venezuelan oil industry last December 2, during the first 10 days of January 2003, two oil shipments were sent to Cuba. By conservative estimates, they account for less than 5 percent of the oil exported by Venezuela following the boycott. Our

country was not the first, but rather one of the last to receive this oil. For more than a month, Cuba did not receive a single barrel of the one and a half million barrels of Venezuelan oil we were supposed to receive in compliance with the Agreement.

However, the malicious individuals who spread lies about the oil that "Chávez gives away to Cuba" do not merely forget the hundreds of million of dollars paid by Cuba to PDVSA, fully complying with its obligations month after month, cent by cent, with considerable effort and sacrifice, as well as the damages caused to our economy by ignoring the clause that obliges any of the parties to provide written notification of the intent to terminate the contract, no less than 30 days prior to the expiration date. They also completely overlook the fact that absolutely nothing is "given away", and that far from being a one way avenue the Cooperation Agreement brings benefits to both nations.

On the other hand, what has Cuba's stance been? Has it caused Venezuela any harm? We need only provide four examples, among others that could be given, of Cuba's cooperation with the people of our sister nation, Venezuela.

A total of 748 Cuban doctors, nurses and health care technicians have provided their services free of charge in the most dangerous and isolated regions of Venezuela, where such services were unavailable before. They have saved numerous lives, and restored the health of tens of thousands of Venezuelans. Thanks to the selfless efforts of these doctors, infant mortality rates in the places where they are working have been reduced from 19.5 to 3.9

deaths per 1000 live births, a better rate than that of any developed country.

At the Latin American School of Medical Sciences in Havana, there are 380 Venezuelan youths studying, also free of charge, alongside thousands of other young Latin Americans. The vast majority of these young Venezuelans are from humble backgrounds, and in just a few short years they will return to their country as professionals. With their training, dedication and ethical and moral values they will radically change the health care situation wherever they work. It would have been impossible for most of these students to cover the costs of their university studies, and it would have been difficult, almost impossible, for the government of Venezuela to spend the 70 million dollars or more that it would have cost to train them in the United States, Europe, or any country with health indicators similar to those of Cuba.

In Cuban health care facilities, 3.042 Venezuelan patients have received medical treatment free of charge; the majority of them suffered from serious illnesses or major injuries, and their treatment, including a good number of highly complex surgical procedures, tests, medications, etc., would have cost the Venezuelan government tens of million of dollars. The total cost of the services provided free of charge by Cuba would, by conservative estimates, amount to more than 100 million dollars in barely two years.

However, it is enough for us to see the recovery of the vast majority of these people, the lives saved, the children, teenagers and adults who, for example, have been able to walk again, the affection and gratitude which they show our

country when they leave. But, to be honest, we would like to know how many of those who are slandering Cuba today would be willing to promote and economically sustain a similar program for their fellow citizens, even using their own professionals and their own health care facilities.

In numerous cities and areas of Venezuela, 600 Cuban trainers and other sports technicians have been working under contracts as part of the Bolivarian government of Venezuela's efforts to promote physical education and sports for the population. While this cooperation has not been provided free of charge, the payment received by Cuba has been far lower than what would normally be charged for a similar number of specialists from other nations or from their own country, if they were available.

Whether they like it or not, no matter how many lies they spread, no matter how many campaigns they unleash, the truth cannot be hidden from the people of Venezuela and the world, who are well aware of the solidarity and generosity of Cuba and its people. The fascists, unscrupulous and heinous as they are, know nothing of such things.

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